

Literary Hybrids

*Cross-dressing, Shapeshifting, and
Indeterminacy in Medieval and Modern
French Narrative*



Erika E. Hess

**Also available as a printed book
see title verso for ISBN details**

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

LITERARY HYBRIDS

MEDIEVAL HISTORY AND CULTURE
VOLUME 21

STUDIES IN
MEDIEVAL HISTORY AND CULTURE

edited by

Francis G. Gentry

Professor of German

Pennsylvania State University

A ROUTLEDGE SERIES

OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

JUSTICE AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF EARLY MIDDLE HIGH GERMAN
LITERATURE
Robert G.Sullivan

MARRIAGE FICTIONS IN OLD FRENCH SECULAR NARRATIVES, 1170–1250
A Critical Re-evaluation of the Courtly Love Debates
Keith Nickolaus

WHERE TROUBADOURS WERE BISHOPS
The Occitania of Folc of Marseille (c. 1150–1231)
Nichole M.Schulman

JOHN CASSIAN AND THE READING OF EGYPTIAN MONASTIC CULTURE
Steven D.Driver

CHOOSING NOT TO MARRY
Women and Autonomy in the Katherine Group
Julie Hassel

FEMININE FIGURAE
Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers
Rebecca L.R.Garber

BODIES OF PAIN
Suffering in the Works of Hartmann von Aue
Scott E.Pincikowski

THE LITERAL SENSE AND THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IN LATE MEDIEVAL
COMMENTARY AND LITERATURE
Mark Hazard

THE REPRODUCTIVE UNCONSCIOUS IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY
MODERN ENGLAND
Jennifer Wynne Hellwarth

MYSTICAL LANGUAGE OF SENSATION IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Gordon Rudy

FAIR AND VARIED FORMS

Visual Textuality in Medieval Illustrated Manuscripts

Mary C.Olson

QUEENS IN THE CULT OF THE FRENCH RENAISSANCE MONARCHY

*Public Law, Royal Ceremonial, and Political Discourse in the History of Regency
Government, 1484–1610*

Elizabeth A.McCartney

THE CONTESTED THEOLOGICAL AUTHORITY OF THOMAS AQUINAS

The Controversies between Hervaeus Natalis and Durandus of St. Pourçain

Elizabeth Lowe

BODY AND SACRED PLACE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE, 1100–1389

Dawn Marie Hayes

WOMEN OF THE HUMILIATI

A Lay Religious Order in Medieval Civic Life

Sally Mayall Brasher

CONSUMING PASSIONS

The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Merrall Llewelyn Price

LITERARY HYBRIDS

Cross-dressing, Shapeshifting, and Indeterminacy in
Medieval and Modern French Narrative

Erika E.Hess

ROUTLEDGE
NEW YORK & LONDON

Published in 2004 by Routledge 29 West 35th Street New York, NY 10001
<http://www.routledge-ny.com/>

Published in Great Britain by Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane London EC4P 4EE
<http://www.routledge.co.uk/>

Copyright © 2004 by Taylor & Francis Books, Inc.

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or here after invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hess, Erika E. (Erika Elizabeth), 1959– Literary hybrids: cross-dressing, shapeshifting, and indeterminacy in medieval and modern French narrative/by Erika E.Hess. p. cm.—(Studies in medieval history and culture ; v. 21) ISBN 0-415-96706-6 (Hardcover: alk. paper) 1. French fiction—To 1500—History and criticism. 2. French fiction—20th century—History and criticism. 3. Gender identity in literature. 4. Body, Human, in literature. 5. Monsters in literature. I. Title. II. Series. PQ221.H47 2003 840.9'353—dc21 2003008545

Series Editor Foreword

Far from providing just a musty whiff of yesteryear, research in Medieval Studies enters the new century as fresh and vigorous as never before. Scholars representing all disciplines and generations are consistently producing works of research of the highest caliber, utilizing new approaches and methodologies. Volumes in the Medieval History and Culture series will include studies on individual works and authors of Latin and vernacular literatures, historical personalities and events, theological and philosophical issues, and new critical approaches to medieval literature and culture.

Momentous changes have occurred in Medieval Studies in the past thirty years in teaching as well as in scholarship. Thus the goal of the Medieval History and Culture series is to enhance research in the field by providing an outlet for monographs by scholars in the early stages of their careers on all topics related to the broad scope of Medieval Studies, while at the same time pointing to and highlighting new directions that will shape and define scholarly discourse in the future.

Francis G.Gentry

*For My Hybrid Family: Bob, Dog-Man Tasha, Mermaid Camila,
Monkey-Baby Lupita, Bat-Dog*

Contents

Acknowledgments	x
Chapter1. Introduction: Narrative Apertures and Physical Hybridism— The Questioning of Authoritative Meaning	1
Chapter2. Passing for True: Gender as Performance in <i>Le Roman de Silence</i> and <i>L'Enfant de sable</i>	38
Chapter3. Parallel Ambiguities: Narrative and Generic	71
Chapter4. The Ultimate Challenge to the Primacy of the Sexed Body	105
Chapter5. Conclusion: The Hybrid as Frame	143
Notes	152
Works Cited	179
Index	186

Acknowledgments

I am deeply grateful to F.Regina Psaki for first encouraging me to pursue a comparative study of medieval and modern French narrative and guiding me in the organization of this study. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Barbara K.Altmann for her thorough reading of the various drafts of this manuscript and assistance in the preparation of all stages of this study. I am also very thankful to Mary-Lyon Dolezal for inspiring my interest in medieval hybrids through visual examples in her seminar, Text and Image.

Thank you also to Laretta De Renzo-Huter and Gerda Reeb for their friendship and support while I was at the University of Oregon, and to Beth Boyd, Nancy Bercaw, Susan Grayzel, and Laurie McClary, members of the Friday afternoon reading group at the University of Mississippi, for their helpful critiques of sections of this manuscript. Thanks also to Terry Berthelot, Michael Lynch, Luanne Buchanan, and Hanne Gaycken, also of Oxford, and to Chanda Hart, Marilya Veteto, and Jane Marks here in Flagstaff for their encouragement and inspiration at crucial moments in the writing of this manuscript. Thank you very much to Louella Holter for help with the final preparation and formatting of this manuscript.

Most important, thank you to Bob for being ever-supportive in all realms—for reading through innumerable drafts of this manuscript, helping me to wrestle with elusive ideas, guiding me to useful texts in the field of postmodern critical theory, and providing many hours of childcare, without which I could not have completed this project.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Narrative Apertures and Physical Hybridism—The Questioning of Authoritative Meaning

Chacun de nous possède un Double, non seulement spirituel, mais aussi ...physique éventuellement. Un Double qui a notre 'forme'..., qui nous 'accompagne'..., qui nous 'informe'...et qui, donc, en tout état de cause, annihile toute solution de continuité entre je ne sais quel monde occulte et le 'réel.'

(Régis Boyer, *Fées, sorcières et loups-garous au moyen âge* 9)

Medieval textuality requires the modern reader to rethink the notions of fragment and whole, continuity and discontinuity, as it locates the play between closure and openendedness on a multi-dimensional continuum operating on many different levels of text and context, form and meaning.

(Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, *Shaping Romance* 11)

In his introductory definition of medieval romance as a genre, Robert Sturges emphasizes the sequential narrative structure of romance quests that repeatedly defers the achievement of an objective or goal (*Medieval Interpretation* 22). Because of this constant deferral of an authoritative meaning, Sturges comes to equate narrative indeterminacy with the genre itself:

Indeterminacy of signification and a multiplicity of possible interpretations are, then, the norm in romance, often preventing the solution of the mystery and keeping the text's semantic gaps from being filled. Interpretation in such texts is necessary, for the reader as for the characters, but since signification has been released from divine control it is also necessarily uncertain or undecidable. It is, in fact, this absence of divine control that defines romance. (23)

Sturges notes moreover that romances often thematize their “mysterious indeterminacy” by featuring characters who must undergo “interpretative activities” very similar to those required of the reader attempting to decipher the text’s narrative and semantic gaps (23). Thus, for the romance hero or heroine, as for the reader, the process of asking good questions becomes more important than ultimately arriving at a single, right answer. Sturges, in his study, and Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner in her work, *Shaping Romance*, on narrative closure and openendedness in twelfth-century French romances, focus on the changing interpretive roles of the author, narrator, characters and reader in the construction of determinate and indeterminate meaning in medieval romance. Bruckner additionally highlights the importance of repetition and renarration, including discontinuities, framing prologues and epilogues, and the reinvention of the story, to arrive at or evade narrative closure.

Although the Middle Ages is often conceived as the opposite, the other, of modernity, the medieval romance’s privileging of the interpretative process over an authoritative meaning certainly also characterizes much contemporary fiction which explicitly and self-consciously rejects narrative closure. A number of scholars have discussed at length various aspects of modern narrative’s “openness,” at times extending their analyses of the rejection of closure to other art forms, contemporary philosophy, science and mathematics. Wolfgang Iser, for example, in *The Act of Reading*, explains the incomprehensibility and structural inconsistencies of much modern narrative as techniques used to force us, as readers, “to reject our habitual orientations as inadequate,” to push us to new interpretations (18). Frederic Jameson, in his discussion in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* of the reinvention of allegory as descriptive of postmodernism, characterizes “our own time” as particularly attuned to “breaks and discontinuities, to the heterogeneous (not merely in works of art), to Difference rather than Identity, to gaps and holes rather than seamless webs and triumphant narrative progressions” (167–8).

Whereas Umberto Eco, in *The Open Work*, finds “‘openness’ of meaning” in the literature of all periods, he distinguishes between the “dynamic” “indeterminacy of effect” of the Baroque, the openness of the “pure poetry” of the period between classicism and the Enlightenment, and the “conscious poetics of the open work” of the late nineteenth-century Symbolists (6–8). Eco further differentiates between the “open work” that requires merely the reader’s active interpretation and the “work in movement” which, because of its “unplanned or physically incomplete structural units,” requires the reader actually to collaborate in *making or creating* the work (12).¹ In the “open works” and the “works in movement” from Symbolism to contemporary art and literature, Eco finds the principles of plurality and ambiguity that he also sees reflected in contemporary scientific thought, modern psychology and phenomenology (14–18).

Furthermore, a significant number of texts, including both medieval romances and contemporary novels, not only require active interpretation on the part of the reader and force characters to struggle to interpret signs within the text, but also feature characters who themselves embody such narrative indeterminacy through their own physical ambiguity or hybridism. These characters may undergo some kind of shapeshifting or metamorphosis, as in the case of werewolves and certain varieties of fairies (e.g., serpent-women/melusines), or their physical form may remain constant, for example, wild men and cross-dressers. For each, his or her dual (or multiple) nature incorporates a complex

image or set of images that destabilizes physical, social and narrative identity. This instability calls into question not only the continuity between the “real” world and the fantastic or occult, which is the subject of Claude Lecouteux’s *Fées, sorcières et loups-garous au moyen âge: Histoire du double*, but also the possibility of a final meaning or single identity.

My comparison of medieval and modern French narrative is based, thus, on the privileging of indeterminate meaning and on the prevalence of marvelous or fantastic hybrid images during both periods. I will argue that the questioning of a single identity or meaning highlights a deep structural parallel between the two periods. Certainly, I may be struck by such a parallel only because I am modern. Yet I, as any reader, must read from within my period, and this perspective enables me to identify cultural constants and cyclically recurring concerns, as well as those that are markedly diverse. In this introductory chapter, following a discussion of the origins of the medieval marvelous, its philosophical context, fall from favor and contemporary revival, as well as the methodological approach that I employ in this study, I turn briefly to three types of hybrid or physically ambiguous characters: the werewolf, the serpent-woman and the wild man. In the body of my book, I then focus in detail on the female cross-dresser in a French medieval romance, the *Roman de Silence*, and in a contemporary Franco-Moroccan novel, *L’Enfant de sable*, examining the interplay between physical and narrative indeterminacy in the two works. I have divided the material on the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* into three chapters: a close study of the construction of gender in the two works, an examination of narrative openendedness and polysemy in each work, and finally, through an analysis of the unveiling scenes of the two transvestite hero/ines, a questioning of the primacy of the sexed body in gender identity.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MEDIEVAL MARVELOUS

The origins of medieval hybrid figures, or of the medieval “marvelous” more generally, extend back to prehistory. Throughout this study, I employ the terms marvelous, wondrous, grotesque and monstrous to refer to the fantastic hybrid figures that inhabit medieval and contemporary literature and art. I shall not undertake a greater refinement or differentiation of these terms; although I recognize that they are not precisely synonymous, I have chosen to use them more or less interchangeably due to the limited vocabulary for these concepts. In this study, I am most particularly interested in the general, cultural fascination with hybrid figures in French medieval and modern narrative—an approximate literary parallel to the grotesques of medieval visual arts—rather than fine distinctions between the types of figures in the texts that I examine.

Jacques Le Goff, in particular, distinguishes in *The Medieval Imagination* between the use of the terms “marvelous” to describe medieval literature and “fantastic” to describe later literature. According to Le Goff, the fantastic, as defined by Tzvetan Todorov (*Introduction à la littérature fantastique* [1970]), “requires an ‘implicit reader,’ who opts for either a natural or supernatural explanation. But the medieval marvelous rules out an implicit reader; it is presented as something objective” (34). Thus, Le Goff rejects the validity of applying Todorov’s work on the fantastic to medieval literature. David Williams also, in *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval*

Thought and Literature, refutes the application of Todorov's definition of the fantastic to medieval works, citing Todorov's emphasis on the role of the *lecteur* as leading to a "similarly restricted definition based in the psychological and subjective" (18). Furthermore, Williams adds that Todorov's dismissal of allegorical or "poetic" readings of the fantastic causes a "historical distortion" by excluding much of medieval literature and art—"the aesthetic sensibilities of the longest period of Western civilization"—while giving priority to Romantic and post-Romantic tastes (18). In this book, I do not employ the term "fantastic" with Todorov's specific definition, but use it more broadly to mean bizarre, strange, wondrous and fanciful, in contradistinction to the everyday and unsurprising.

The fantastic medieval and modern hybrid figures that I examine in this study each have a long and rich history. Adam Douglas traces the history of the werewolf myth to the "Sorcier des Trois Frères," a late Paleolithic wall painting that depicts the "Sorcerer" as an indeterminate half-animal, half-human form; to the classical Egyptian god of death, Anubis, who had a canine head and a human body; and to the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, in which the goddess Ishtar turns her faithful shepherd into a wolf (*The Beast Within* 26, 36, 39). Max Gilbert compares the myth of Mélusine to Herodotus's story of Scythes, the ancestor of the Black Sea Scythians, who was the love-child of Hercules and the "she-viper" Echidna (*The Fairies Melusine, Viviane, and Aine* 57). P. Martin-Civat notes dozens of other attempts to discover the origin of the story of Mélusine, ranging from Greek and Roman antiquity, to ancient Asian religions and the divinities of Africa (*Le Très simple secret de Mélusine* 11–20). Richard Bernheimer looks to the hairy beast-man Enkidu of *Gilgamesh* as a source of the wild man myth (*Wild Men in the Middle Ages* 3). As precursors to Silence and other medieval female cross-dressers, we find ancient mythological hermaphroditic and androgynous figures, as well as maiden warriors such as the Volscian queen Camilla in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Jacques Le Goff argues, based on early medieval hagiography, that the marvelous was rejected or at least repressed during the early Middle Ages, from approximately the fifth to the eleventh century (28–29). Yet, Isidore de Seville's (c. 560–636) encyclopedic *Etymologiae* was often directly incorporated, along with the *Physiologus*, into later medieval bestiaries. Isidore's system of categorizing monstrosity and his descriptions of specific monsters had an undeniably strong influence on medieval images of man-beast hybrids, as did the earlier *Historia Naturalis* by Pliny (first century), *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* by Solinus (third century), and the *Hexameron* by Ambrose of Milan (fourth century). Solinus's work in particular focuses on the marvelous and gives special attention to the fantastic habits of Ethiopian, Indian and other Eastern races.

Thus, when the medieval marvelous seems to (re)appear "suddenly" in twelfth- and thirteenth-century narrative, it is important to bear in mind that these images and tales are inherited from long traditions as already partly rationalized. The medievals did not themselves create them entirely; rather, they incorporated and developed their marvelous images from a broad range of older folklore, popular and oral traditions, and literature. Similarly, as scholars attempt to identify a purpose or function of the medieval marvelous they generally find that it cannot be narrowly specified. Jacques Le Goff lists a number of possibilities, including a compensation for deprivations in the real world, a challenge to Christian ideology, a rejection of Manichaeism, and a "more thorough explanation of the whole of reality than was available anywhere else" (40). Lorraine Daston and

Katharine Park, whose *Wonder and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*, is the result of more than twenty years of collaborative work on wonders, marvels and monsters, note in the introduction to their book that the two authors still do not agree on the underlying meaning or attraction of the marvelous: “One of us believes that wonders appeal because they contradict and destabilize; the other, because they round out the order of the world” (11). For many years, scholars have concentrated especially on the “recusative”² function of medieval marvels, especially of gargoyles and other grotesques—that is, their signification as demonic or morally reprehensible—which, as Williams notes, may be the easiest signification of the monstrous to comprehend and to describe (16): “Thus gargoyles we are told, perched on the most extended architectural points of medieval cathedrals, are there to preach about exile from sanctity caused by sin; through fear, repulsion, or ridicule, various deformities represent the satanic and its triumph through sin” (16).³

Undoubtedly, all of these analyses of the purpose or function of the medieval grotesque have validity, yet the most persuasive from my point of view is that which emphasizes the monster’s ability to disrupt and challenge logical thinking, argued most strongly and clearly by David Williams in his work on the role of the monster in medieval culture, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Art and Literature*. The werewolf, wild man, serpent-woman and cross-dresser, in their hybridism, ambiguous morphology and extraordinary and unexpected characteristics, confound normal expectations. They interrupt or deform logical, rational thinking and encourage the reader to re-evaluate prior assumptions.

PHILOSOPHICAL NEGATION AND THE MONSTROUS

The important symbolic role of the monster in medieval thinking figures as the focus of David Williams’s *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*. Noting that “not all monsters are philosophical or spiritual; some are just decorative” (3), Williams nonetheless identifies a strong attitude unique to the Middle Ages that viewed the monstrous as “a deformation necessary for human understanding”: “Unlike an earlier period in which the monster was conceived as an omen or magical sign, the Middle Ages made deformity into a symbolic tool with which it probed the secrets of substance, existence, and form incompletely revealed by the more orthodox rational approach through dialectics” (3). According to Williams, the symbolic value of deformity during the Middle Ages lay precisely in its negation of rational constructs. As the audience (viewer or reader) contemplated a monstrous image, she would be forced to realize its negation or nonrepresentation of any reality encountered to date. Ultimately, this realization would lead to an awareness of the transcendence of God.

Although the conceptual roots of this *via negativa* reside in the pre-Christian tradition of philosophical negation, the intellectual system reappears during the Middle Ages in the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500?; Williams 4).⁴ As Williams notes, Dionysian negative theology was an intellectual system of “vast influence throughout Christian history,” particularly influential from the eighth through the fourteenth centuries (4). Williams identifies the Neoplatonic roots of this tradition which valorized the grotesque and monstrous: “The more unwonted and bizarre the sign,

it was thought, the less likely was the beholder to equate it with the reality it represented” (4).⁵ The supreme aspiration of the *via negativa* was spiritual, based on the central belief that “God transcends human knowledge utterly and can be known only by what He is not” (5) and on the necessity of correcting the human tendency toward anthropomorphism:⁶

In the highest representative operation of all, that of signifying God, a purification of the naturally anthropomorphic human mind was necessary and could be accomplished through the negation of every possible affirmation about God. After this process of affirming and negating, the mind, encountering a reality beyond affirmation and negation, a reality which *is-not*, finally knows God as a paradox: the One who is source of the many, beyond being yet cause of being, present everywhere within the world while totally transcendent. The most suitable representation of such a being is likewise that which is-not, achieved, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, by resorting to the most inordinate, absurd, and monstrous images. Thus the grotesque enables the ‘divinization’ of human intelligence by initiating a negation of all affirmative names. (Williams 4)

René Roques adds in his preface to *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* that the highest levels of intelligence require a seemingly contradictory renunciation of intelligence and of self: “The radical critique and rejection by the intelligence of each of the names that are...accessible to it indicate definite steps forward...in the direction of its own divinization. Paradoxically, then, the divinization of the intelligence is dependent on this same intelligence renouncing its own output, its order of thought, and, more radically, its own self” (6–7).

Whereas the philosophical tradition of negation was preeminently theological, it became a broader medieval “habit of thought” (Williams 11) and, as Williams underscores, found expression in a great number of contexts, including, significantly for my purposes, literature, and the visual arts:

Concepts such as paradox, negation, contrariety, nonlimitation, and related ideas were as attractive and useful in aesthetic speculation as they were in metaphysics, and the basic concept of nonbeing found symbolic representation in the monsters and misshapen fantasies of mediaeval art and poetry. Like the deformations used in the philosophical and theological discourses, aesthetic deformations also propose a fundamental critique of rational discourse. (4)

As the deformed image in literary or artistic production challenges “the adequacy of the intellectual concept of the thing in relation to its ontological reality” (5), it also confronts the more generalized relation of sign to signified: “Thus the monstrosity of a human figure with three heads or a tree with the power of speech functions to upset the mental expectations about the relation of the sign to what it is supposed to signify and to underscore the element of the arbitrary in the relation of the two” (Williams 5). We find, then, in medieval literature and art the suggestion of a (post)modern crisis of the

transcendental signified *avant la lettre*, as well as an interrogation of the adequacy of rational thinking.⁷

Sturges, however, who also identifies the shared concern of medieval and postmodern thinkers with the relation of the sign to the signified, is careful not to equate the two periods:

I do not wish to claim that Derrida's project is a repetition of medieval modes of thought.⁸...The postmodern rejection of the transcendental signified is not the same thing as the late medieval conception of a God who cannot be known by humans, and the self-consciousness with which Derrida destabilizes texts is not the same thing as manuscript *mouvance*, though the terms in each of these comparisons do have obvious similarities. The Middle Ages had not experienced modern positivism and hence had no need to reject it, as postmodern thinkers have done. (2-3)

In spite of his reservations, Sturges does suggest the usefulness of a medieval-postmodern comparison: "Nevertheless," he adds, "the deconstructive free play of writing may have something in common with, and something to tell us about, interpretation in the Middle Ages"(3). In this study, while I underscore similarities between the medieval and postmodern and maintain that the questioning of a single identity or meaning constitutes a deep structural parallel between the two periods, I certainly agree with Sturges that one cannot simply equate the two.

The questioning of the relation of the sign to the signified and of logical thinking is embedded within the term "monster" itself, as Williams points out. This term includes within it the linguistic roots of the kind of investigative learning that occurs through the contemplation of a monstrous image:

Such a critique [of rational discourse] is created through a certain dismantling of rational and logical concepts in which conventional signs of these concepts are deformed in ways intolerable to logic so as to 'show forth' (*monstrare*, as distinguished from *(re)praesentare*). Thus the etymological origin of the monster contains within it its intellectual kinship to heuristic understanding. (*Deformed Discourse* 4)

Williams, then, uses the term "deformed discourse" to refer to the nonrepresentative and self-referential discourse, typical, according to his analysis, of the medieval period, that describes monstrous beings who are themselves physically deformed. I contend that we can find a very similar kind of physical and narrative *deformity* in modern French narrative as well.

THE "DEMOTION" OF THE MONSTER AND ITS CONTEMPORARY RESURGENCE

No doubt the past will resist any attempt to impose a periodization upon it. But certain ways of dividing it up are

more illuminating than others. (Jacques Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination* 9)

Although monsters and the marvelous did not disappear from Western literature and art between the medieval and modern periods, their importance diminished dramatically. The precise date when these wonders ceased to fascinate to the same extent varies according to scholars, their analytical criteria and methodology. In the modern era, however, we again find the marvelous and monstrous tremendously attractive, with hybrid figures playing prominent roles in literature, film, popular fiction and comic books, and the visual arts. Williams states that there is “ample evidence” that the medievals also believed in literal, physical manifestations of the monstrous images that they represented in literature and art (11), whereas virtually no serious modern person would uphold such beliefs; yet both periods share a pronounced cultural interest in the monster and a concomitant questioning of the adequacy of rational thought. Furthermore, in each period we also encounter a simultaneous line of thought that strives to rationalize and categorize, to contain and subdue the monster, even as the monster betrays the foundations of such thinking. Williams refers to this as the *via positiva*; Sturges calls it the “determinate mode of thought.” Sturges notes that the indeterminate mode never supplants the determinate:

The possibility of a mode of thought that does not seek to control signification and that renders all interpretation potentially indeterminate impinges on more determinate modes. Although the former becomes more and more powerful between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, it never completely displaces the latter; despite important historical changes in all these aspects of medieval culture, the two modes of thought remain in competition throughout the period. (6)

The attempt to intellectualize the monster does not truly threaten its existence, for the monster is formed in resistance to existing categories. The two lines of thought are compatible, indeed, even mutually dependent.

Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park situate medieval interest in the monstrous within a more general attraction to wondrous beings, objects and events, each of which are defined as “wondrous” precisely because of the emotion of wonder that they aroused in the beholder. In their *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, Daston and Park trace interest in wonders and the monstrous, especially within the broad field of the natural sciences, from late Antiquity through the Enlightenment. They note that although specific wondrous objects and beings changed through time, their definitions as “wondrous” were consistently related to the emotional response that they provoked:

The tradition [of wonders] had a strong coherence, which rested in both the objects of wonder and the passion that they inspired. The canon of natural wonders had a stable core throughout the period we have studied (and indeed back into the Hellenistic period), with a penumbra that expanded and contracted as ideas, experiences, and sensibilities changed.

At the center lay the most enduring marvels, like African pygmies, the mysterious lodestone, the glowing carbuncle, or the properties of petrifying springs. Over the course of time, some objects dropped out of this canon for various reasons. The basilisk was debunked, comets were explained, and unicorn horns became too common, even before they were reclassified as narwhal tusks: wonders had to be rare, mysterious, and real. At the same time, such new objects joined the canon of wonders as monstrous births, recuperated from the canon of horrors, and the louse, a marvel under the microscope. Reassessing the meaning (and thus the emotional import) of an object or revealing a previously hidden characteristic could make it grounds for wonder. The passion and the objects mutually defined each other, a process in which neither remained static. (16–17)

The appeal of the wondrous persevered for a number of centuries until it began to lose its intrigue, especially as a topic of serious study.

To illustrate the modern lack of interest in the monstrous among academic circles, Daston and Park describe their initial attraction to the subject some twenty years ago. Daston and Park, who are now a medievalist and a *dixhuitième*iste, respectively, a social historian of medicine and an intellectual historian of mathematics, mention in the introduction to their book that they first became interested in natural wonders while enrolled in a graduate seminar in the 1970s on seventeenth-century metaphysics. They note that neither their classmates nor their professors shared their attraction to monsters: “Our seminar read the usual authors, but where our classmates saw arguments, we saw monsters—lots of them, everywhere. Bacon, Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke—all put monsters on the front lines of their campaigns to reform natural philosophy, explain religion, explore the relationships between art and nature, or challenge natural kinds” (*Wonders* 9). They add that while writing their “sober dissertations” on Renaissance medicine and Enlightenment probability theory, they continued to work on monsters on their own: “We spent many hours reading treatises and broadsides with titles like *The Hog-Faced Woman* and *A Thousand Notable Things*” (*Wonders* 9–10). When they published their research in 1981, it was unique: “It was very nearly the only historical treatment of monsters in English published in the previous fifty years” (*Wonders* 10).⁹ Now, however, the intellectual climate has changed radically. As Daston and Parks emphasize, monsters, marvels, prodigies and *Wunderkammern* are currently “all the rage,” with new books appearing on the subject “almost weekly” (*Wonders* 10). Daston and Park ask what has happened in the last twenty years to change the academic attitudes so dramatically. They credit Foucault’s historico-critical work on deviance and normalcy as contributing to a serious interest in the extraordinary and the marginal, as well as the work of anthropologists like Mary Douglas on “entities who straddle cultural categories” (*Wonders* 10), but they also underscore a profound shift in sensibilities: “More generally, the last twenty years have seen a deep questioning of ideals of order, rationality and good taste—‘traditional hierarchies of the important and the essential’—that had seemed self-evident to intellectuals since the origins of the modern Republic of Letters in the late seventeenth century” (*Wonders* 10). As a result of this investigation into traditional conceptions of order and social and intellectual propriety, those subjects that previously

occupied the margins have moved into the center in terms of their cultural and academic appeal. The monster, and particularly the hybrid being, in its interrogation of direct representation and challenge to the limitations of strict categorizations, figures prominently in this change of socio-intellectual climate.

By the twelfth or thirteenth century, medieval and early modern European vocabulary for the modern English “wonder” and “wonders” was unified and consistent (*Wonders* 16).¹⁰ This suggests, Daston and Park state, that the medievals shared a “strong common understanding” of what constituted the wondrous: “First, the words for passion and objects were, if not identical, then closely related, signaling the tight links between subjective experience and objective referents. Second, these languages all blurred the sacred and the secular objects of wonder—the miraculous and the marvelous” (*Wonders* 16). This blurring of the sacred and the secular indicates the impossibility of separating these two kinds of wonders in the dominant Christian culture, in spite of the attempts of theologians and philosophers to pinpoint the distinctions between them (*Wonders* 16).

Although interest in wonders was unified and enduring in medieval Europe, this unity begins to erode by the Enlightenment or Romantic period in the analysis of Daston and Park and other scholars, and by the beginning of the Renaissance, according to others. Daston and Park note that especially as regards the role of wonder as a precursor to scientific inquiry, the Enlightenment forms a pronounced change of viewpoint. While seventeenth-century scientists considered wonder as a “goad to inquiry” and also viewed wonders as themselves “prime objects of investigation” (*Wonders* 13), after the Enlightenment wonder became a “disreputable passion,” “redolent of the popular, the amateurish, and the childish” (*Wonders* 15). René Descartes, for example, in 1642 held a positive view of wonder, calling it “the first of the passions, ‘a sudden surprise of the soul which makes it tend to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary’” (*The Passions of the Soul* 70; cited in *Wonders* 13). Similarly, in 1605, Francis Bacon proposed reconfiguring the field of natural philosophy to include a “history of marvels” (*The Advancement of Learning* 330; cited in *Wonders* 13).¹¹

Serious scientists certainly no longer include wonder alongside their data, nor do they refer to it as an integral component of their research, as Daston and Park underscore: “Scientists now reserve expressions of wonder for their personal memoirs, not their professional publications. They may acknowledge wonder as a motivation, but they no longer consider it part of doing science” (*Wonders* 15). By the time of the publication of Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* (from 1751–80), marvels had lost their appeal among intellectuals, as the corresponding entry emphasized: “The author of the unsigned article entitled ‘Merveilleux’ doubted whether the cultivated French public could ever again stomach an epic on Homeric or even Miltonian scale, filled with the wondrous feats of gods, angels, and devils: ‘Whatever one says, the marvelous is not made for us’” (*Wonders* 329; *Encyclopédie* vol 10, p 395).¹² Although fairs still exhibited monsters, and gazettes reported fantastic occurrences, by the mid-eighteenth century the monstrous and marvelous were relegated to popular culture and no longer considered a serious intellectual pursuit.¹³

Whereas Daston and Park specify the Enlightenment as the turning-point in intellectual attitudes toward wonders and the monstrous, Marie-Hélène Huet identifies the nineteenth century as the critical moment in her analysis of monsters, particularly of “monstrous” children. Huet, in *Monstrous Imagination*, demonstrates that from classical

antiquity through the Enlightenment, we find a strongly recurring perspective that views the mother's fickle and powerful imagination as responsible for the birth of a monstrous child:

A remarkably persistent line of thought argued that monstrous progeny resulted from the disorder of the maternal imagination. Instead of reproducing the father's image, as nature commands, the monstrous child bore witness to the violent desires that moved the mother at the time of conception or during pregnancy. The resulting offspring carried the marks of her whims and fancy rather than the recognizable features of its legitimate genitor. (1)

The monstrous child thereby "erased paternity," according to Huet, and "proclaimed the dangerous power of the female imagination" (1). Moreover, the monster (which Huet relates to the Latin *monstrare*: to show, to display; *montrer* in French) was taken as a sign or message from God (Huet 6):¹⁴ "Monstrous births were understood as warnings and public testimony; they were thought to be 'demonstrations' of the mother's unfulfilled desires. The monster was then seen as a visible image of the mother's hidden passions" (6). Huet adds that this theory of the genesis of the monstrous child gained popularity in the seventeenth century, culminating in "the hotly debated Quarrel of Imaginationism," which continued through the eighteenth century (Huet 6).

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the dominant role of the maternal imagination in the creation of a monstrous child is replaced in the literature of the period by that of the father: "By assigning to the artist as monstrous father the power once attributed to the mother to create singular progeny, the Romantic metaphor of procreation restaged in its own terms the ideology of misguided desires that spawned aberrant offspring" (Huet 3). Some of the Romantic writers and artists that Huet analyzes in terms of their reappropriation and modification of the theory of maternal imagination are Henri de Balzac, Marie Tussaud and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. In each case, Huet demonstrates how they "reassigned the *vis imaginativa* to the father," reclaiming "the imagination as a masculine attribute," and reinterpreting "art as teratology" to emphasize the uniqueness of art (8–9).

The association of the female and the monstrous dates back at least to Aristotle, who, in the fourth book of the *Generation of Animals*, clearly links the two.¹⁵ This analysis, as Huet points out, identifies the female and the monstrous as both "departures from the norm [that of the father], as two exceptions to another tenet of Aristotelian doctrine,...that 'like produces like'" (3). "'The woman is as it were a deformed male,'" Aristotle stated, but her deformity is necessary and useful for the continuation of the species (Cited by Huet 3; Aristotle III, iii, 175). The monster, on the other hand, is "gratuitous and useless for future generations" (Huet 3). Furthermore, the monster is deceptive because it resembles other species to which it is not related, thereby blurring the differences between genres and disrupting the "strict order of Nature" (Huet 4):¹⁶ "Thus, though the monster was first defined as that which did not resemble him who engendered it, it nevertheless displayed some sort of resemblance, albeit a *false* resemblance, to an object external to its conception" (Huet 4, emphasis original). Huet credits a lost text, attributed to Empedocles, as the origin of the belief in the power of the

maternal imagination to shape her progeny: “Empedocles was said to have stated that ‘progeny can be modified by the statues and paintings that the mother gazes upon during her pregnancy’” (Huet 4–5).¹⁷

Whereas Huet traces the roots of the theory of maternal imagination to late Antiquity and notes that this theory continued to be forcefully debated through the Enlightenment, she focuses in her book on the role of this theory from the Renaissance to the end of the Enlightenment. She skips over the Middle Ages entirely.¹⁸ Daston and Park, on the other hand, study the commonalities and recurring themes in attitudes toward wonders, including monsters, from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment. They do not find any distinct change before or during the Renaissance. David Williams, from yet another perspective, focuses in *Deformed Discourse* on the role of the monster in the Middle Ages. In this learned, thorough and well-documented work, Williams presents a strong case for the uniqueness of the medieval conception of the monster. He identifies the Renaissance as the decisive moment of change in serious opinion concerning monsters.

Although the negative tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius and his followers was tremendously important to medieval thinking,¹⁹ its prominence began to wane even before the end of the Middle Ages. As Williams notes, the negative tradition gave way to precisely the philosophy that it refuted:

The Areopagite’s explanation of God, the world, being, and human knowledge became the singularly most influential conception in Western thought until it was superseded by the philosophy it had rejected totally, the rationalism and reliance on logic that begins to emerge in the thirteenth century and soon becomes the dominant characteristic of Western thought, presupposed as fundamental to intellectual inquiry. (23)

Williams identifies this “rationalism and reliance on logic” as the “nascent empiricism of the neoscientific Renaissance” (324). But although he associates this new empiricism with the disappearance of monsters from literary and philosophical discourses, he notes that the “modern” change of attitude did not originate here exclusively: “It was hardly the mere practice of dissection or the invention of the microscope that in and of themselves inaugurated the new mentality hostile to the fantastic” (324). Characterizing the subject of inquiry during the Renaissance as increasingly narrow and more focused, Williams proposes that dissection and the microscope become the metaphors that replace those of the monstrous and the deformed (324).

Williams, after Heidegger, points out that this change in focus carries with it a new conception of the human as subject:

For the Middle Ages man is the observer-knower, all reality the *subjectum*. With the development of science, humans themselves become the subject of cognition and eventually the first and only subject of ‘science.’ With this shift, the human takes the place of reality, and reality becomes identified with human conceptualizations. (324)

Williams, again after Heidegger, further elaborates on this transition, describing it as the gradual mental shift that moves from regarding “the world and reality as the subject of

human understanding” in the Middle Ages to “a contemplation of itself as the sole subject and locus of the real” in the Renaissance. He notes that this change of focus implies a movement from the medieval “‘direct experience’ of being” to the modern “‘scientific’ worldview as essentially a *concept* of being” (Williams 324, italics in original; Heidegger, *Chemins qui ne mènent à nulle part* 80–82).

With this transition to a more narrow focus of study and emphasis on the human-as-subject, we also find a gradual decrease of interest in the monster. However, Williams underscores that “the demotion of the monster in the intellectual and cultural life of the West was neither sudden nor complete” (324). As prominent examples to the contrary, Williams cites Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* (1590) and Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), both of which feature monsters as key characters, as well as Ambroise Paré’s *Des monstres et prodiges* (1575), which Williams refers to as “one of the best-known treatises on the monster” (325). In Spenser and Milton, however, Williams locates a conceptual shift in their treatment of the monster away from the medieval.

Identifying the characters Error in Spenser’s *Faerie Queen* and Sin in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as “monsters,” Williams notes that although they are featured descriptively and dramatically, they have “lost something of their rank in the narrative order” (325). Error and Sin act more as foils to their heroes who, in turn, endeavor to destroy the monster and thereby liberate the world and the self:

Spenser’s monsters, like Milton’s are didactic artifacts functioning at the tropological level of the text and having nothing to do with the ontological status of the hero. Rather, they define his psychological condition—in Red Crosse’s case, before his attainment of the heroic state, in the case of Milton’s Adam, after his fall from that state. In both instances, however, the monster has ceased to function as the embodiment of paradox that must be encountered and embraced. (325)

Of Paré, on the other hand, Williams states that the authorial commentary throughout *Des monstres et prodiges* “identifies Paré’s attitude toward his subject as thoroughly medieval” (325). The evidence of a conceptual shift lies, in Paré’s case, not in the author’s treatment of monsters but in the intellectual establishment’s reception of the work, which demonstrates, Williams emphasizes, “the beginnings of the tendency to exile to the ranks of the popular the monstrous representations that once functioned at the highest levels of intellectual discourse” (325).

When Paré published the second edition of *Des monstres et prodiges* in 1575, the Faculty of Medicine in Paris attacked Paré’s competence and condemned his work: “Details of this condemnation furnish informative examples of the new ‘scientific’ attitude, which eschewed ‘wonder’ for fact and which was willing, even eager, to accept the limits of human reason as its boundaries” (Williams 325–26). The Faculty called Paré to a hearing to discuss his “offenses,” including having published in French instead of Latin, and having published on monsters (Williams 326; Céard xv).²⁰ In his defense, Paré declared that the tradition of teratological discourse was long and honorable, and included works in the vernacular. As Williams states, however, the Faculty of Medicine seemed ready to censure this entire tradition:

Estienne Gourmelen, eminent Professor of Surgery at the College Royal, probably expressed for all his colleagues the attitude toward the deformed that was considered appropriate for science and that Paré had violated. Gourmelen stated before the hearing 'that M.Ambroise Paré had composed a book containing many things abominable, as well as harmful to good behavior and to the State.' (Williams 326; Le Paumier 89)²¹

But Paré's only real "offense" was to have misunderstood the change in intellectual climate.

Paré could not understand why his work should not take its place within the long teratological tradition.²² He objected to the Faculty's charges by claiming that the monsters he had described could be found in many other books and in the "real world":

Et quant a cest advisement que vous faictes touchant les Monstres, je les ay recueillis de Rondelet, Gesnerus, Cardan, Boiastuau, lequel pour le jourdhuy est ordinairement entre les mains des Dames et Demoiselles. Davantage n'est-il permis de les voir en chair et en os tous les jours en ceste ville de Paris et ailleurs? (Williams 366 n. 12; Paré xv-xvi)

Paré's hearing stands as a cultural and intellectual landmark—an official pronouncement of the intellectual establishment's position in opposition to the monster. "Paré ran into difficulties," Williams notes, "because he became an obstacle to the new 'scientific' spirit of inquiry, which, as Heidegger suggests, takes the human as both its subject and its criterion; in a world which has become a human 'concept,' the marginalization of the monster is essential" (326). This marginalization of the monster characterizes much of the following centuries.

Although we are clearly witnesses to a modern revival of the monstrous and fantastic, it is difficult to designate the moment at which attitudes changed. In *Les Maîtres du fantastique en littérature* François Raymond and Daniel Compère state that the importance of monsters and marvels declined until the nineteenth century, following the Industrial Revolution. They point to the "fundamental upheaval of the relationship between man and his environment" caused by the Revolution, and note that in its aftermath new ways of thinking develop: "Les modèles de pensée sont remplacés par de nouvelles ideologies et la conception du surnaturel évolue également" (16). Although a number of Romantic authors begin to write "strange" and "extravagant" tales, for example, Nodier and Maupassant, scholars consider Edgar Allan Poe's "fantastique intérieur et intense" the forerunner of the modern fantastic (Raymond and Compère 16). This "modern fantastic" arises as a reaction against an overreliance on scientific thinking: "Ce fantastique—appelons le: moderne—ne peut apparaître que dans un contexte de bouleversement, avec ses espoirs, ses illusions, ses deceptions. Il se manifeste en contrepoint à la science, à la technique, à la logique" (16). Modern monsters, in other words, represent a counterpoint to the linear logic of positivism.

Franz Kafka, in the footsteps of Henry James, continues to develop an "interior" fantastic, in which the supernatural is largely absent and the "monsters" are now called the Law, the City, the Family, etc. (Raymond and Compère 130). After 1920, however, the Surrealists renovate supernatural effects, especially in their paintings. We can find

similar effects in the fiction of Julien Gracq and André Pieyre de Mandiargues by the late 1930s (Raymond and Compère 148). In general, by the period between the two world wars, we find an increasing movement among writers of the fantastic away from the nineteenth-century fascination with “le frisson”: “Ces romans [ceux de Gracq, Pieyre de Mandiargues] rejoignent un courant de fantastique poétique dont les auteurs ont pour point commun l’importance donnée à la rêverie et aux correspondances entre le réel et l’imaginaire, plutôt qu’au frisson de l’inconnu” (148). Raymond and Compère then broadly characterize the rupture that signals the contemporary fantastic as a conception of the absurdity of the world or as a form of modern horror (190). I would emphasize also that especially in contemporary literature that features hybrid beings, we find a questioning of traditional dichotomies and a recognition of the limitations of rational thinking. These figures, through their complex and indeterminate morphology cross boundaries and blur categories; they challenge us to expand our awareness.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL CONCERNS

My methodology in this study draws broadly from narratological, poststructural, and feminist analytical approaches. Through a series of close readings, I examine the manner in which these texts defer definitive, authoritative meaning, through the creation of narrative gaps and undecidable interpretations. Much of my thinking regarding the contemporary rejection of the transcendental signified is grounded in Derridean or other poststructuralist theories. Additionally, several of the critics that I employ, for example Judith Butler, base important aspects of their own work on texts by Michel Foucault. Whereas there would surely be ample scope for a psychoanalytic reading of hybridism and doubling, I do not undertake such a reading in this study; rather, I draw from an eclectic combination of primarily formalist analytical strategies.

I must also acknowledge that a number of critics reject the validity of comparing medieval and modern literature, while others would disagree with my perspective of the high Middle Ages as characterized by a deep tension between determinate and indeterminate meaning. The concerns and primary objections of those who would disagree with me arise generally from a point of view that regards the Middle Ages as both homogeneous and profoundly *other*. According to this view, the alterity of the medieval period refutes the application of many modern critical frameworks as well as medieval-modern comparisons.

Lee Patterson recounts, in “On the Margin,” the traditional historical *grand récit* that identifies modernity and the modern as originating in the Renaissance and thereby overlooks the Middle Ages as alien and obscure. According to this perspective, the Renaissance is the beginning of modern thinking, especially of historical consciousness and a sense of individual selfhood. Patterson notes, however, that this historical narrative originated with the Renaissance thinkers themselves. In their efforts to identify their world as the present moment and thus to distinguish it from that which came before, these Renaissance *men* characterized the Middle Ages as primitive, superstitious and decidedly *unmodern*. According to Patterson, this “master narrative” perseveres even to this day and influences the portrayal of the Middle Ages, especially in works devoted to the Renaissance,²³ as well as that of some medieval scholars.²⁴ Moreover, as Patterson also

notes, medievalists have tended to attribute legitimacy to their chosen field by means of the rigorous scholarship required of their work and their own “pure,” “objective” analytical stance, and have thus emphasized the technical in medieval studies over its contemporary relevance:

For if texts can be shown to bear meanings that do not accord with what has always been taken to be authentically medieval, then the notion of a homogeneous, monolithic Middle Ages that has always provided interpretive stability to the entire project, and respect for the disciplines of medieval studies in all their austere rigor, is called into question. (Patterson 103)

Patterson, in contrast, emphatically opposes this point of view.

There are numerous critics, however, who either deny that there is no justification for comparing the medieval and modern periods, such as Patterson, or who argue for comparisons between medieval and (post)modern literature in terms that are both theoretically astute and historically sensitive, such as, for example, Robert Sturges in *Medieval Interpretation*. Patterson, in his essay, refutes the view of the Middle Ages as alien and *unmodern*. He advocates practical changes to energize the field of medieval studies and to integrate it more fully with the rest of the modern human sciences. He proposes a confrontation of “the ahistorical claims now being made in certain sections of Renaissance studies” and urges his fellow medievalists to participate with their nonmedievalist colleagues in conferences, on journals and in other areas of academic life (104). He challenges the perspective that depicts the “universalist, homogeneous Christendom of the Middle Ages” (105) and he closes by citing E.N.Johnson’s address to a joint session of the American Historical Association and the Medieval Academy with a “call to arms” for medieval scholars to justify their interests by highlighting their relevance and contributing to the solution of major contemporary problems.

Sturges, on the other hand, focuses on problems and potential advantages of medieval-postmodern comparisons. He criticizes the ahistoricism of recent scholars who apply poststructuralist theory without “fully assimilat[ing]” it “in historical terms,” but he still upholds cautious commonalities between the two periods, such as the blurring of literary “functions”: “For medieval as for postmodern writers, the author, text, and reader can easily seem less distinct from one another than we have been trained to conceive of them, and indeed they might be regarded less as separate entities than as three literary functions that continuously interact in various combinations” (3). Sturges would not identify the medieval as the foundation of (post)modern epistemology, yet he repeatedly points to shared concerns during the two periods as a means of understanding the history of reading and the problems of interpretation in the Middle Ages.

Through an examination of medieval and modern hybrid figures, I intend to study the similarities and differences between the literary portrayal of physical and narrative indeterminacy in the two periods. A number of differences are immediately apparent, such as the markedly stronger connection between narrative and psychological incoherence in the contemporary works. In *L’Enfant de sable*, which I examine in detail in this study, as in *Le Sommeil d’Eve* and *Les Noces barbares* which I look at only briefly in this introductory chapter, psychological instability and the exploration of the limits of

sanity play a significant role in the characters' investigations of their personal identity. Furthermore, the modern works each include extended passages of first-person narration by the hybrid character, while third-person narration dominates in the medieval romances. The medieval monstrous figures generally do not reflect on their own monstrosity, while such reflection predominates in modern narrative.

Before turning to a more extended analysis in the body of this study of the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, I will briefly discuss in this introductory chapter three other examples of hybrid figures—werewolves, serpent-women and wild men—in order to underscore the manner in which hybridism constitutes a ubiquitous metaphor for indeterminacy in both medieval and modern French narrative. I begin by looking at the more “magical,” dramatic and profoundly unstable shapeshifting hybrids, the werewolf and the serpent-woman, and follow with a short discussion of the physically static hybrid, the wild man, before turning to a three-chapter analysis of the French literary cross-dresser. For each hybrid type, I pair one French medieval romance with a contemporary novel, comparing and contrasting physical and narrative ambiguity in the two works. The four medieval romances date from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries; the contemporary novels all date from the 1980s, with the exception of *La Vouivre*, which dates from 1945. The language of the medieval texts indicates that their authors all came from Northern France; of the contemporary novelists, two are of French nationality, Marcel Aymé and Yann Queffélec, one is an Algerian living in France, Mohammed Dib, and the other is Moroccan, Tahar Ben Jelloun.

FOUR HYBRID TYPES

Hybrid beings may be formed as combinations of humans and animals, of two or more animals, or even of some mixture of humans, animals and objects. Claude Kappler notes in *Monstres, démons et merveilles à la fin du Moyen âge* that the definition of the monstrous hybrid is rather general: “Nous désignerons sous ce terme général d’hybridation tous les êtres qui sont constitués d’éléments anatomiques disparates qui rompent l’aspect physique normal” (147). This definition does not adhere to the more precise and technical definition of biological hybridization: “Le terme d’hybridation n’est pas pris ici dans son sens strictement biologique. On appelle hybridation ‘un croisement entre sujets différant du moins par la variété. Pratiquement, les hybridations entre variétés, espèces différentes, sont courantes, celle entre genres différents extrêmement rares’” (Kappler 147; *Dictionnaire de Robert*, article “Hybridation”). Kappler underscores that monstrous births were a favorite theme in Antiquity and were “courant” in the Middle Ages: “Le thème des naissances monstrueuses est de tous les temps et de toutes les cultures! Pline (*Hist. Nat.*, VII, 2) explique la naissance de créatures mi-humaines, mi-animales par la copulation d’êtres humains avec des animaux. Plutarque explique de la même manière la naissance de minotaures, sylvaains, aegyptiens, sphinx et centaures” (147). In her own typology of hybrids, Kappler includes such categories as “Les monstres hybrides de plusieurs animaux,” “Les animaux qui se contentent de changer de tête,” “Des monstres à deux corps, l’un humain, l’autre animal,” “Des humains à tête d’animal,” and “Des monstres animaux à tête ou à tronc humain” (148–

57). Kappler identifies the paintings of Bosch as the supreme visual example of monstrous hybridization:

Si l'hybridation' entre l'homme et l'animal est extrêmement fréquente, celle qui s'instaure entre animaux d'espèces et de genres différents a également connu un prodigieux succès. Ce sont ces deux méthodes, poussées jusqu'à leurs plus extrêmes limites, auxquelles s'ajoute même le mélange d'objets inanimés, qui font des monstres de J.Bosch des créatures si originales dont les possibilités de renouvellement sont infinies. (147)

In French literature also, in both the medieval and modern periods, we find an extraordinarily abundant selection of hybrids.

My own choice of four hybrid types was somewhat random. I looked for hybrids that played a prominent role in both a medieval romance and a modern novel, and I wanted to examine types of hybrids that differed markedly one from the other. I could, however, have chosen other medieval works that feature other types of hybrids (for example, *Huon de Bordeaux*, in which the midget “fairy” Oberon has marvelous powers that he attributes to Jesus; Marie de France’s *lai* “Yonec,” that tells the fantastic tale of Yonec and “l’oiseau bleu”; or many others); or I could have focused instead on the narratives of medieval epic heroes or on the stories of saints’ lives, which constitute the literary center of Williams’s *Deformed Discourse* because of the prevalence of monsters in these two differing genres; or I could have chosen to study medieval travel narratives, which also often feature a tremendous number of colorful monsters and other wonders, and which are one of the literary focal points of Daston and Park’s *Wonders*. One of the reasons I chose to study hybrid figures in French romance is that, as I noted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, the sequential structure of romance quests postpones the characters’ fulfillment of goals or objectives as it defers authoritative meaning, thereby further developing the thematics of indeterminate meaning.

As concerns modern French literature, the field of choice is so rich and varied that I still doubt some of my selections. I intend to develop this study in the future, to consider the works of other modern writers of the fantastic (for example, André Dhôtel, Julien Gracq, Marcel Brion, Marcel Schneider, Pierre Very, Jean-Louis Bouquet, Marcel Béalu, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, André Hardellet, Boris Vian, Thomas Owen, Claude Seignolle, Alain Robbe-Grillet and others), especially those who also foreground narrative indeterminacy through the use of techniques that exploit narrative openness and undecidability).²⁵ I would also like to consider more contemporary novelists who explore hybrid themes without necessarily featuring beings who are themselves physically deformed or undergo some kind of shapeshifting. Contemporary Maghreb writers in particular often touch on such themes as they explore sociocultural hybridism.²⁶ Indeed, I would like to look at French cinematic hybrids.

Certainly some hybrids are horrific, even demonic. Especially in modern literature, the monstrous often appears hand-in-hand with the macabre and the occult, with psychological terror, or blood and gore. The contemporary French magazine *Angoisse* headlines such works.²⁷ Williams, however, underscores that in the medieval negative philosophical tradition, the monster functions not as an embodiment of evil, a demonic figure to avoid or destroy, but as “the embodiment of paradox that must be encountered

and embraced" (325). Through such an "embrace" of the paradoxical and ambiguous, the reader (audience or viewer) approaches new modes of thinking and perspectives—"whole dimensions of reality to which human reason has no access" (Williams 325). Rather than symbolizing potential dangers and harm, then, the monster completes the representation of the universe "by adding to nature and to logic the outer dimensions of being" (Williams 325) even as it calls into question the adequacy of the notion of representation itself.

WEREWOLVES: GUILLAUME DE PALERNE AND LE SOMMEIL D'EVE

A comparison of the late twelfth-century French romance, *Guillaume de Palerne*,²⁸ and the contemporary Franco-Algerian novel, *Le Sommeil d'Eve* (1989) by Mohammed Dib,²⁹ presents a medieval and modern interpretation of the traditional lycanthropic legend wherein a human metamorphoses into the body of a wolf, becoming a werewolf (in French, *loup-garou*).³⁰ "Lycanthropy" is named for Apollo Lycaeus whom Augustine describes in the *City of God* (17:17) as the object of a religious cult of the wolf, and is based on the association of the Roman scholar and encyclopedist Varro with ritual cannibalism (Williams 121). Very often, according to werewolf legends, the transformation into a werewolf is a form of punishment or curse; the werewolf retains human rationality and "nature" beneath the bestial form. Williams underscores that this human-beast hybridism is crucial to the power of the legend: "There is no suggestion that in changing appearance the human truly becomes a beast; if that were so, the being itself would be in no way monstrous, but rather simply a beast" (124).³¹

Lecouteux identifies in the medieval tradition of the werewolf the theme of the animal double, *l'autre moi animal*. He analyzes this Double in psychological terms as the subject's alter ego: "L'*alter ego* psychique apparaît sous celle d'un ours s'il est bien intentionné ou amical, sous celle d'un loup et même d'un phoque s'il est malin et cherche à causer du tort" (*Fées, sorcières et loups-garous au moyen âge* 142). In later works, however, the animal double takes on a darker aspect due, according to Lecouteux, to the intervention and lack of understanding of the Church and others: "L'in-compréhension, la méconnaissance ou l'oubli de la croyance archaïque en l'existence d'*alter ego* thériomorphes, l'intervention de l'Eglise et des lettrés ont fait basculer la métamorphose vers le merveilleux ou le satanisme, l'exemple du loup-garou en est une excellente illustration" (143). In contemporary literature and film featuring werewolves, the werewolf is indeed often associated with the subject's insane or diabolical alter ego. Adam Douglas uses this very term as he describes a typical contemporary cinematic rendition of the myth: "Tension slowly builds all the while, the dreadful time approaching as inevitably as the monthly reappearance of the full moon in the night sky, the signal for that cataclysmic eruption when the monstrous animal *alter ego* will burst forth in all its snarling hackle-raising fury" (*The Beast Within* 1). This contemporary cinematic depiction of the werewolf portrays a werewolf that threatens society and himself. He must be rejected and overcome—either captured or destroyed—in order to save the community. In contrast, in the medieval text, *Guillaume de Palerne*, and, I will argue, in the contemporary novel, *Le Sommeil d'Eve*, the werewolf is a force to be embraced.

In the contemporary novel, *Le Sommeil d'Eve*, we find the werewolf associated with excessive desire and terrifying loss of control, while in the medieval romance, we encounter a gentle, caring and attentive werewolf. In each instance, the other characters must turn toward the werewolf, rather than away, in order to learn the lessons that he has to offer. Douglas addresses the double symbolism of the werewolf in early societies as associated with both fertility and death:

It is also clear that Paleolithic man lived in much closer proximity to the animal world than does modern man, and that animals had important spiritual functions in early societies, being particularly associated with the need to communicate with the other world. The wolf had a special association with death in its unpleasant guise as a scavenger and devourer of human corpses, yet,...it was also recognized as having some connections with the winning of fertility and plenitude of game. Both of these sides of the wolf—the horrific and the benign—were to be fully represented in the later development of the werewolf legend. (*The Beast Within* 37–38)

In *Guillaume de Palerne*, the werewolf is allied, if not precisely with fertility and plenitude, certainly with the *product* of fertility—a child. Repeatedly throughout the medieval romance, the werewolf protects the young Guillaume from a series of threatening situations.

In *Guillaume de Palerne*, Brande, the second wife of the king of Spain and evil stepmother to Alphons, transforms her stepson into a werewolf³² so that her own son, Brandin, can become the next king of Spain. Throughout the long and complicated plot, Alphons-as-werewolf acts as protector to the young Guillaume, who is himself the lost son of the king of Apulia, but whose true identity is unknown even to himself. Time and again the werewolf rescues Guillaume from one mortal danger after another, as in the following passage in which the werewolf watches over Guillaume for eight days while protecting him from the wild beasts that roam the forest near Rome:

Mais or est drois que vos retraie
 Del leu qui o l'enfant s'enfuit.
 Tant l'a porté et jor et nuit
 Et tante terre trespassee
 Que pres de Roume en la contree,
 En une grant forest s'arreste
 Ou ot mainte sauvage beste.
 La se repose .VIII. jors entiers.
 L'enfant de quanques fu mestiers
 Li a porquis la beste franche:
 Onques de rien n'ot mesestance.
 En terre a une fosse faite

Et dedens herbe mise et traite
 Et la feuchiere et la lihue
 Que par dedens a espondue.
 La nuit le couche joste soi
 Li leus garous le fil le roi,
 L'acole de ses .IV. piés,
 Si est de lui aprivoisiés
 Li fix le roi que tot li plaist
 Ce que la beste de lui fait.
 (*Guillaume de Palerne* 166–186)

Guillaume “turns toward” or “embraces” the werewolf figure as Alphons rescues and protects him, seeing Guillaume safely through his many adventures. On the intellectual level also, the werewolf is a positive source of information, providing important clues concerning Guillaume’s identity. The hybrid nature of Alphons picks up on and echoes Guillaume’s mistaken (or double) identity as the characters of Alphons and Guillaume both include a hidden aspect that while central to their identity remains unseen. Alphons’s appearance as a werewolf also serves as a warning for the limited power of cognition: those characters who rely on material signs mistake Alphons for a ferocious beast.³³ Only the characters who look beyond the material and “read through the sign” are able to see Alphons’s loyal and loving nature, hidden beneath his bestial form (Williams 124).³⁴

Williams highlights the “concealing and revealing” that are part of the process of the “body-deforming monstrosity of the shape-shifter,” but points out that in the case of the werewolf, the concealing and revealing are contradictory: “Unlike other rhetorical uses of this device, the concealing-revealing of the monster is paradoxical: stripping naked conceals the self in hairy, lupine form; covering with clothes rids the self of masks and reveals it in its true form” (124). Furthermore, as the transformation of the human into werewolf reverses the normal relationship of concealing and revealing, it also constitutes an ironic critique of the sign and signified that indicates the idealism of the traditional connection between the two:

The deforming body in this manner creates a monster of signification in which sign and signified are radically divorced and the contingency of their habitual relationship underscored. But the critique of the relationship between sign and signified is ironic in that it not only parodies the intellectual vulgarity of materialism, which underlies the privileging of the sign over the signified, but also rejects the supposedly spiritual, or ideal, conception of the precedence of the signified over the sign. The contravention that takes place through the monstrous divorce of bodily form from existential nature, when form and nature are seen as paralleled by sign and signified, is the discountenancing of all theories of discourse. (Williams 124–25)

Throughout *Guillaume de Palerne*, the characters' repeated use of disguises in order to escape from their enemies further amplifies this thematic of the inadequacy of the sign and the limitations of logical thinking: Guillaume, his love, Melior, and even Guillaume's mother, Felice, disguise themselves at various points in the story as white bears and as deer in order to elude their persecutors. Guillaume and Melior must escape from the Emperor of Greece who has asked the hand of Melior for his own son, Prince Partendon; they sew themselves up in the skins of two white bears and escape to the forest where they wander until they are saved by the werewolf. Next, the two lovers travel to Benevento where the werewolf again helps them avoid capture. They disguise themselves as a hart and hind and travel safely to Sicily. Soon thereafter, Queen Felice has a dream vision, recognizes the hart and hind as Guillaume and Melior, and disguises herself also in a hart's skin so as to escape from the Spaniards who are pressuring her for the hand of her daughter, Florence. She offers protection to Guillaume and Melior, provided that Guillaume will deliver her from the Spaniards. He does so happily, battling the Spaniards valiantly with the emblem of a werewolf painted on his shield. In the end, the wicked Queen Brande disenchant's Alphons, who marries Florence and becomes the new king of Spain, while Guillaume marries Melior and not long afterwards ascends to the throne as the new Emperor of Rome. We thus see time and again an interplay of the thematics of confused or mistaken identity and the insufficiency of logical thinking, as these characters repeatedly conceal their identity through disguises that underscore the lack of correspondence between the appearance and the hidden content, the sign and the signified. The questioning of identity and of the adequacy of representation culminates in the coronation of a New Order—a sociopolitical parallel to the logical and narrative upheaval.

In *Le Sommeil d'Eve*—the second part of Mohammed Dib's Nordic trilogy, following *Les Terrasses d'Orsol* (1985)³⁵—Dib also investigates the concepts of true and mistaken identity through the theme of lycanthropy. Dib, however, frames the question of identity within the context of a love triangle, based on a short story about medieval lycanthropy by Aino Kallas (1878–1956), entitled “La Fiancée du loup.” *Le Sommeil d'Eve* recounts the story of Faïna, a Finnish woman who is married to Oleg and pregnant with their son (Lex), but who loves Solh, a North African immigrant living in Paris. Faïna loves “the wolf” in Solh and becomes possessed by the wolf to such a degree that her own identity and her sanity become profoundly unstable. Yet, she must follow the call of the wolf who speaks to her in a disembodied voice; she cannot run away:

Tu reprends ta vraie nature, ta nature de louve. Tu t'appelles Louve. Mais chut. [...] Solh, lui, avait retrouvé la sienne déjà avant. Tu ne l'avais pas encore reconnu. Et il était déjà Loup. Et on l'avait repoussé loin de toi. La condition oubliée, le nom oublié. Ils peuvent le demeurer indéfiniment. Et pendant ce temps elle, la bête, avance vers vous cachée sous un voile de mariée. Elle avance, prête à presser une faim humaine contre votre poitrine. Que personne surtout ne vienne à l'apprendre. Il ne faut pas, faut pas, faut pas. A aucun prix. (*Le Sommeil d'Eve* 68)

As the werewolf assumes possession of Faïna, making of her a psychological hybrid, the narrative also belies a strict division between characters. Faïna narrates the first half of the novel, while Solh narrates the second, but both make references to the other and the two narratives frequently retell the same events from another perspective. The narrative also highlights its own openendedness through the avoidance of traditional punctuation marks, as in the above citation which does not close with the anticipated period mark.

Throughout the novel, thoughts, feelings, dreams and dialogue blur together so that the reader often loses the chronology of events, and can no longer distinguish the “real” from the “imaginary.” Jean Déjeux emphasizes the way in which such narrative ambiguities reflect the crisis of selfhood in Dib’s work and call into question the adequacy of language to communicate accurately the lovers’ feelings:

Le romancier joue comme d’habitude avec les doubles, le mystère, le secret dans une écriture admirable, poussée jusqu’à l’extrême de ses possibilités pour dire cette fusion de l’aimée et de l’aimé jusqu’à ‘l’anéantissement’ (*fâna*). Allant l’un vers l’autre, les amants s’identifient dans le miroir. Mais est-il possible de parvenir à la limite? de transgresser la loi? Est-il possible aussi d’aller au-delà de ‘l’opacité du langage’? (*Maghreb littératures* 386)

But while Dib explicitly problematizes personal identity and narrative/ linguistic sufficiency, I suggest that very similar issues are at play in *Guil laume de Palerne* and that the werewolf topos informs both works in a significant manner, setting the stage for the shifting of identity as for the shifting of shape.

Whereas the modern novel, *Le Sommeil d’Eve*, closes in typical modern fashion without resolution of Faïna’s hybridism, the medieval romance, *Guillaume de Palerne* sees Alphons’s return to his human form. Rather than simply constituting a happy ending and narrative closure, however, this return to the human again stresses the inadequacy of human cognition. Williams notes that while the werewolf and those characters around him come to realize that the self exceeds the material body, the audience sees the limitations of the signifying process itself:

The werewolf’s return to human form seems to bring with it, both for the werewolf himself and those around him, a new perception that the body, inasmuch as it is a material shape, is a container somehow inadequate to the self, which it confines; the audience, witness and participant in these metamorphoses and transitions, gains the parallel realization that the signifying process, in this case, body=being, may be insufficient for the communication of meaning. (Williams 125)

Indeed, in *Guillaume de Palerne*, the scene in which Guillaume meets Alphons following the latter’s transformation back into his human body, highlights Guillaume’s misinterpretation and a lack of awareness.

Although Guillaume has spent many years with Alphons-as-werewolf, who has acted as Guillaume’s closest companion and frequent savior, Guillaume fails to recognize him once Queen Brande returns Alphons to his “true” form:

‘Sire Guillaume, dist Alphons,
 Or sui ici en tes maisons.
 Porter me devroies honor,
 Car je vos ai servi maint jor,
 Por vos ai eüs mains ahans,
 Perix et maus et paors grans.
 De maint peril vos ai estors
 Ou vos fuissiés et pris et mors,
 Se je ne fuisse et Diex avant.
 Or m’en faites petit samblant,
 Mais ne me connessiés puet estre,
 Car molt ai puis mué mon estre
 Et ma samblance et tos mes fais,
 Puis que ne me veïstes mais.’
 Sire Guillaumes respondi:
 ‘Vairs est c’onques mais ne vos vi.
 —Si avés fait, je le sai bien.
 —Il ne m’en puet menbrer de rien
 Que jou onques mais vos veïsse.
 Mais, se Diex vostre cors garrisce,
 Dites nos dont qui estes vos. (7859–79)

In spite of Guillaume’s previous close relationship with Alphons-as-werewolf, the limitations of his cognitive abilities cause him to misread Alphons’s identity once Alphons has resumed a human form. In both *Guillaume de Palerne* and *Le Sommeil d’Eve*, the enchantment of the werewolf serves as the framework within which the author explores the themes of true or false, simple or complex identity, the limitations of rational cognition and logic and of the sociopolitical status quo. The ambiguities and paradoxes of the monstrous hybrid reflect the questioning and upheaval that run through the works on the thematic level.

SERPENT-WOMEN: MÉLUSINE AND LA VOUIVRE

Mélusine, the fourteenth-century romance by Jean d’Arras,³⁶ and *La Vouivre*, the modern novel by Marcel Aymé (1943),³⁷ offer two powerful images of the serpent-woman legend. In traditional tales and visual depictions, melusines appear as human females in their upper bodies, but as snakes or sea-serpents in their lower bodies. Williams traces the origin of the melusines to tales of Celtic water fairies, but notes that in medieval literature melusines are frequently depicted in and around fountains, rather than in the sea as are

their predecessors (183). Sometimes melusines also have wings and can fly, as in the case of Jean d'Arras's Mélusine. Gilbert Durand identifies melusines as the European version of the universal ophidian symbolism in which "le motif des ailes vient de compléter le maléfisme ophidien" (*L'Imagination symbolique* 365). Indeed, we often associate snakes with treachery and evil, and the affiliation of women with serpents typically underscores the dangerous and destructive power of women.

Marija Gimbutas emphasizes, however, in *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* that the "malevolence" of ophidian figures is hardly universal. Through the study of vestiges of sculptures, vases and other cult objects, Gimbutas has found evidence of Snake Goddesses in ancient European civilizations, from the seventh to the fourth centuries B.C.E. These Snake Goddesses are either half-human, half-serpent, or are entwined by snakes and embody "the creative principle, responsible for the cyclic return and renewal of life" (Emerick, "*Le Roman de Mélusine: A Request for Balance*" 12). Barbara C. Walker adds that in the Hindu tradition, the Mother of All that Moves and the Goddess of the Earth were also called Sarparajni, or Serpent Queen, and the Indian Serpent-Goddess, Radru, was so powerful that she gave birth to an immortal line of cobra people called Nagas, whom she fed through "her divine lunar blood." The Nagas were associated with abundance and richness; they guarded "great treasures of wealth and precious stones, and sometimes books of secret teachings in underwater palaces" (Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* 903–4). Radru also has a Babylonian counterpart, the Goddess Kadi of der, who is worshipped as a serpent with a woman's head and breasts. The children of this goddess are mermaids and mermen, human from the waist up, but water-serpents below (Walker 904). The Egyptians worshipped many other female goddesses that they depicted in association with snakes, including Isis, whom the Greeks and Romans adopted. Isis is represented with snakes entwining her head, forming part of her hair. In ancient Egypt, she was worshipped as the great divine mother of all nature; by the time of Herodotus, Isis was the primary goddess; by Roman times, she had attained a status of universal power, and is identified in Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* as the Mother of Nature and the highest of deities, queen of the Underworld and of Heaven (Emerick 14). In both the medieval romance *Mélusine* and the modern novel *La Vouivre* we find complex serpent-women who are worthy of this long, complicated and contradictory heritage.

In the romance, Mélusine appears in her human form as a strikingly beautiful woman. When Remondin first sees her, he is overcome by her beauty:

Et quant Remondin l'ouy, si la regarde, et percoit la grant beauté qui estoit en la dame; si s'en donne grant merveille, et ne lui semble mie qu'il eust oncques mais veu si belle.... Si respondi moult humblement: Chiere dame, ...or veuillez savoir qu'il ne demourra pas pour peine ne pour travail que je n'assouisse votre plaisir a mon pouvoir, se c'est chose que bons crestiens puist par honneur entreprendre. (24–25)

Mélusine is straightforward in her response to Remondin; she is not timid or hesitant. She asks him to marry her, but makes him vow never to visit her on Saturdays. Mélusine's half-serpent form is the result of a curse that her nymphal mother, Pressine, had put on Mélusine for imprisoning her mortal father Elinas, King of Albania, after he broke his

oath. Although Elinas's broken oath sends Mélusine, her two sisters, and mother into exile on the lost isle of Avalon, Pressine still loves him deeply.

Pressine casts a spell on Mélusine, condemning her to be transformed each Saturday into a serpent from the waist down. If, however, Mélusine finds a human man who will marry her and promise never to seek her out on Saturdays (or, at least, if he breaks his vow, not to tell anyone else that he has done so), then Mélusine will die as a mortal. Mélusine makes these stipulations clear to Remondin and he agrees to abide by them:

Par foy, dist la dame, c'est bien dit.... Mais il fault premierelement que vous me promettez que vous me prendrez a femme. Et ne vous doubtez, car seurement je suiz de par Dieu. Et Remondin jura que si feroit il. Oil, dist elle, il ne vous puet tourner a nul prejudice que de tout bien. Vous me jurerez sur tous les seremens que preudoms doit faire, que le samedi vous ne mettez jamais peine a moy veoir ne enquerre ou je seray.

(*Mélusine* 25–26)

Mélusine's own comment, reassuring Remondin that she is "of God" ("Et ne vous doubtez, car seurement je suiz de par Dieu") anticipates his doubt and suspicion later, when his brother, the comte de Forez, drives him to spy on Mélusine one Saturday in order to silence (or confirm) the court rumors that she secludes herself each week either to indulge in debauchery or to do penance for being enchanted by an evil spirit. Throughout the romance, Mélusine attends church regularly and participates in all of the standard Christian rituals. Her monstrous form does not seem to contradict her suitability for a Christian husband, yet those who base their judgment of Mélusine only on the most immediately apparent signs jump to the mistaken conclusion that her unusual behavior must be due to diabolical forces.

Prior to Remondin's breach of faith, Mélusine proves herself to be a powerful helpmate, and an attentive wife and mother. Before their marriage, following Remondin's promise not to see her on Saturdays, Mélusine had promised in return to bring him great fortune and honor.³⁸ Following their marriage, Mélusine initiates the construction of the Château de Lusignan, which is carried out in grand style, oversees many other building projects (including the construction of cities, fortresses and churches), and bears Remondin ten sons. That each one of Mélusine's ten sons is born with some kind of physical mark or deformity, however, underscores their monstrous lineage.³⁹

In *La Vouivre*, the Vouivre is associated with snakes through her friendship with the land and water vipers and through the serpent-entwined magical stone that she wears on her headdress. Like Mélusine, she is particularly beautiful, strong and independent:

Derrière la vipère apparut une fille jeune, d'un corps robuste, d'une démarche fière. Vêtue d'une robe de lin blanc arrêtée au bas de genou, elle allait pieds nus et bras nus, la taille cambrée, à grands pas. Son profil bronze avait un relief et une beauté un peu mâles. Sur ses cheveux très noirs relevés en couronne, était posée une double torsade en argent, figurant un mince serpent dont la tête, dressée, tenait en sa mâchoire une grosse pierre ovale, d'un rouge limpide. D'après les portraits qu'on lui en

avait traces et qu'il avait crus jusqu'alors fantaisie, Arsène, reconnu la Vouivre. (*La Vouivre* 10)

The bare feet and arms and tan face of la Vouivre associate her with the wildness of the natural world, and her masculine beauty and powerful gait bespeak a kind of androgynous strength and allure. La Vouivre also lives apart, away from the world of the village people who have difficulty accepting her “scandalous” existence. Arsène, however, is intrigued by her mystery and seeks her out. He becomes infatuated with la Vouivre, but, as is the case for Remondin, his actions ultimately lead to grave consequences for himself personally and for his family and community. In the end, the serpents kill and devour Arsène, presumably because they want to protect their mistress. In the final scene of the novel, la Vouivre leans over Arsène’s lifeless body, searching in his unseeing eyes for “le secret du grand mystère qu’elle ne devait jamais connaître” (251). Raymond and Compère state that Aymé thus emphasizes the intractable dissymmetry of their union: “Aymé souligne ainsi le contact impossible entre ces deux êtres qui n’appartiennent pas au même monde” (160).

The deformities of the sons of Mélusine and Remondin also seem to mark the inappropriateness of their marriage long before Remondin dissolves their relations with his angry and careless outburst.⁴⁰ Lecouteux provides a summary of the sons’ physical “stains”:

Urien a un oeil rouge, l’autre pers, et ses oreilles sont aussi grandes que les anses d’une mesure a grain;... Eudes possède une oreille plus grande que l’autre; Guyon n’a pas les deux yeux à la même hauteur; Antoine porte sur la joue une patte de lion, velue et aux griffes acérées; Renaud naît borgne; Geoffroy possède une dent de sanglier qui sort de sa bouche de plus d’un pouce; Fromont a sur le nez une tache ‘velue comme la peau d’une taupe’; Horrible est doté de trois yeux. (*Mélusine et Le Chevalier au cygne* 20–21).

Lecouteux analyzes these deformities as a remnant of totemism and identifies a gradual cleansing of the “stain” as the deformities decrease in severity with each subsequent birth: “Notons que ces tares sont de moins en moins prononcées, comme si la malediction pesant sur Mélusine s’affaiblissait, et ses deux derniers fils, Thierry et Raimonet, sont normaux” (21). He sees in this reduction of deformities a sign that Mélusine is nearing absolution for the imprisonment of her father. Emerick, however, takes issue with Lecouteux’s analysis, underscoring the monstrosity of the eighth son, Horribles:

It is true that no physical imperfections are ascribed to Mélusine’s last two sons,...but neither are the days of their births made part of the text, that being the moment at which the physical deformities of the first eight sons are described. Even if this is not an oversight on the part of Jean d’Arras and he did indeed intend no corporal flaws in the descriptions of the two youngest, Mélusine’s eighth son hardly supports Lecouteux’s claim. Horribles is not only grotesque, having three eyes, but his disposition is so cruel and aggressive that he is responsible for the killing of two

governesses by the age of seven! Mélusine declares him to be such a threat to human life and the family's future that her final counsel to Raimondin is to commit infanticide for the good of the family. It seems more plausible that Horribles underlines the importance of these strange physical characteristics, and the sons that bear them, to the interpretation of Mélusine's mythic content. (41)

Emerick's interpretation of the "mythic content" of Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine* focuses on the manner in which the character of Mélusine unites the mythology of the pre-Christian Earth Mother goddess, which Emerick describes as deeply important to the medieval nobility,⁴¹ with the newer Christian beliefs and rituals. For Emerick, Mélusine succeeds at finding a "balance" between the two traditions.

I would agree that the character of Mélusine works toward an integration of the mythology of the Earth Mother goddess and Christian traditions, and add that Mélusine's weekly metamorphosis asserts the separation of the physical and the spiritual. As Williams states more generally, "The shapeshifter declares the independence of life from the material body. The migrating self is a spiritual reality that, through misadventure, finds itself contained in the wrong container or that, for nobler reasons, chooses the wrong container" (124). The deformities of Mélusine's sons also highlight the autonomy of the material body. Particularly striking is the manner in which the sons' deformities isolate and stress separate bodily features, leading to a depiction of the sons as composite beings rather than as unified wholes. In each case, the relation of the part to the whole is not as it should be. This physical disunity challenges the accepted "natural" order that depicts "normal" bodies as entire and consolidated. It underscores the complexity and compound nature of the hybrid and presents Mélusine's sons as monstrous Others whose varied physicality confronts the traditional thinking that emphasizes the necessity of physical harmony and unity.

In *La Vouivre* too, after Belette takes la Vouivre's diadem, the serpent friends of la Vouivre attack and kill the young girl. The serpents then turn on Arsène, who had responded to Belette's cry. In his description of Arsène's lifeless body, in the final scene of the novel, the narrator highlights isolated body parts, each damaged by the serpents:

Arsène et Belette ne remuaient plus. L'homme était étendu sur le dos, les épaules calées par une petite butte de terre, et tenait la fille embrassée. Il serrait d'une telle force que la Vouivre dut renoncer à dénouer l'étreinte de ses bras. Le sang qui avait taché sa chemise et ses habits, coulait sur ses mains couvertes de morsures. Son cou déchiré en était inondé, mais son visage était à peine déformé par une boursoufflure où les marques des crocs ressemblaient à des piqûres d'épingle. Un reste de vie brillait dans le regard des petits yeux gris dont la douceur étonna la Vouivre. Les lèvres bleuies remuèrent pour épeler dans un dernier souffle des paroles qu'elle n'entendit pas. (251)

In both *Mélusine* and *La Vouivre*, then, the monstrous hybrid serpent-woman is closely associated with bodily fragmentation. Not only are the body parts of Mélusine and la

Vouivre described in detail, but each character is intimately linked to deformities and physical disunity in others.

In Mary Wakeman's study of the function of the monstrous in creation myths, *God's Battle with the Monsters*, she identifies a close connection between the monster figure and bodily fragmentation. "A continuous theme in all mythic narrative," according to Wakeman's analysis, "is the dismemberment and scattering of the monstrous body as the means by which creation as multiple beings comes to be; often joined to this theme is the complementary theme of gathering up the pieces of the whole to create order and civilization" (Williams 126). While I do not intend to construct a parallel between creation myths and *Mélusine* or *La Vouivre*, I do find Wakeman's analysis of the role of dismemberment in creation myths helpful in reading these two texts. In *Mélusine* and *La Vouivre*, the monstrous character is not herself dismembered but is implicated in the fragmentation of others. Furthermore, the fragmentation of those characters most closely associated with the serpent-woman—Melusine's sons in *Mélusine* and Arsène in *La Vouivre*—suggests again their own monstrosity. In each instance, contact with the hybrid has led to a dramatic physical disunity and bodily partitioning in the characters involved.

In creation myths, Wakeman notes that the monster functions as the principle of chaos, whereas the gods, who gather and reintegrate the fragmented monstrous body, function as the principle of order. For Wakeman, the monster is thus "a symbol contrary to life" and "a univocally negative force" (Williams 125). Williams, however, takes issue with Wakeman's view of the monster as negative. He stresses that rather than opposing life, these monsters present a different type of energy and life force:

As Wakeman herself points out, the tension in all the myths appears to be between two forms of vitality, what one might describe as the striving to establish one or the other of two polar oppositions as the principle of life: The conflict is over the control of vital energy. The direction of activity after the victory [of the hero-god over the monster] is toward form: from wet to dry, chaos to order, free to bound energy.' (Williams 125–26; Wakeman 12)

We do not find in *Mélusine* or in *La Vouivre* a force that strives to reintegrate the fragmented bodies following the dismemberment, but each work certainly presents a tension between two lifestyles or "principles of life." The unconventional existences and vigorous energy of the serpent-women oppose the more "ordered" and "bound" energy of the medieval royal court and the rural village community. Additionally, the serpent-women do inhabit distinctly wet environments—Mélusine bathes in her bathtub while in her serpent form, and la Vouivre frequently swims in the snake-filled *étang* on the outskirts of town. Yet, in neither of these works does the "dry," controlled, civilized society appear as a positive force; rather, the reader sees clearly the short-sightedness, biases and limitations of the thinking of the dominant social group. In contrast to the stagnant reasoning and inertia of the dominant society, Mélusine is fantastically productive both in her improvements to Remondin's holdings and in the number of offspring that she bears, and la Vouivre's vitality is intense and deep. Perhaps the union between such a dynamic and complex hybrid and a mere mortal must ultimately remain untenable, yet the serpent-woman in her challenge to the integration of parts and the

whole, interrogates in a potentially liberating manner the traditions of unity, order, and control.

WILD MEN: YVAIN, LE CHEVALIER AU LION, AND LES NOCES BARBARES

Hayden White underscores the way in which the concept of “wildness” is a cultural construct, identifying attitudes or behaviors that oppose a society’s opinion of what is appropriate or “civilized”:

The notion of ‘wildness’ (or in its Latinate form, ‘savagery’) belongs to a set of culturally self-authenticating devices which includes, among many others, the ideas of ‘madness’ and ‘heresy’ as well. These terms are used not merely to designate a specific condition or state of being but also to confirm the value of their dialectical antitheses: ‘civilization,’ ‘sanity,’ and ‘orthodoxy’ respectively. Thus, they do not so much refer to a specific thing, place or condition as dictate a particular attitude governing a relationship between a lived reality and some area of problematical existence that cannot be accommodated easily to conventional conceptions of the formal or familiar. (Hayden White, “The Forms of Wildness” 4)

In both Chrétien de Troyes’s twelfth-century romance, *Yvain, ou Le Chevalier au lion*,⁴² and Yann Queffelec’s modern novel, *Les Noces barbares* (1985),⁴³ a character whom society identifies as “wild” or “mad” confronts this label. Through their speech or behavior the “wild” characters in both of these works challenge that categorization; they problematize the perception of wildness as “natural”; and they force the reader to reflect on the meaning of civilized behavior and on the mechanisms of social inclusion.

I describe the hideous herdsman in *Yvain* and the wild child Ludovic in *Les Noces barbares* as “wild men” in reference to the mythical, bestial character of the Wild Man, who often lived in the wilderness surrounded by other animals. Richard Bernheimer, in *Wild Men in the Middle Ages*, traces literary and visual representations of wild men from the hairy beast-man Enkidu in *Gilgamesh* through the Middle Ages, while Dudley and Novak’s collection of essays *The Wild Man Within* extends their study through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. Bernheimer notes that although the wild man is a literary and artistic figure “whose imaginary character is proved by its appearance,” we find tremendous variation between representations of wild men (1). Most often, a wild man is a hairy man (though wild women are not uncommon in Germanic folklore) who demonstrates human and animal traits and lives in isolation, away from society. Frequently wild men are mute (although the beastherd in *Yvain* is articulate); generally they are violent and aggressive; and in many cases their wildness and abandon extend to an emotional or psychological lack of control, or lunacy.

In earlier times, people believed in the physical existence of wild men, often characterizing as “wild” those Others who differed from the dominant society in terms of race, customs, or religious beliefs.⁴⁴ In modern times, anthropological investigations have

disproven the reality of the myth, yet, as Peter L. Thorslev states, “As myth the Wild Man is immortal: one might almost say that he flourishes the more, the fewer facts support his existence” (“The Wild Man’s Revenge” 281). In contemporary literature and film, the wild man as savage, barbarian or giant has come to be replaced by the more interior force of the emotional unconscious, including the potentially destructive energies of psychological instability and dementia. One could say that today’s “psycho-killer” is yesterday’s wild man. Indeed, Dudley and Novak trace a movement beginning in the Romantic period toward a confrontation with “the Wild Man within” and note that “this interiorization of the Wild Man coincided with the disappearance of the dark places of the planet” (312).

Thorslev identifies Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as the turning-point in the modern portrayal of the wild man, as the monster takes on characteristics of two versions of the traditional wild man myth—that of the “Noble Savage” and of the “Child of Nature.” In the end, Frankenstein’s monster regrets deeply his violent acts:

The real evil exists not in the heart of the Wild Man but in the heart of the man who created him.... As the remorseful monster explains, at the close of the narrative, his murders were the uncontrollable effects of a passion for revenge which was a direct result of an unending and unendurable loneliness, of the frustrations of his natural desires for companionship and love. (Thorslev 304)

The monster’s explanation in his own words at the end of *Frankenstein* renders visible and unmistakable the projections and externalization of civilized man’s “darker side” that once formed the hidden basis of the wild man myth. This, according to Thorslev, is his “revenge”: “The final revenge of the Wild Man comes when, as in the Gothic tradition, the myth becomes transparent, and civilized man is forced to recognize that the only source of evil, as well as the only sanction of value, is within himself” (305).

In *Yvain*, the wild beastring plays a small part within the romance as a whole, yet his colorful, composite physicality draws attention to him in a way that exceeds his limited appearance in the text. Bernheimer characterizes Chrétien’s depiction of this monstrous beastring as “the most famous... of all the works of art and literature describing the wild man as lord over the beasts” (27). The narrator of *Yvain* describes in detail the savage nature and deformities of the hideous herdsman—his giant head, tufted hair, abnormally broad forehead, elephant-sized ears, heavy eyebrows, flat face, owl-like eyes, cat-like nose, wolf-like jowls, boar-like teeth, disheveled beard and mustache, extraordinarily long chin and humped back. He lives in the glades of the enchanted forest of Brocéliande, wields a club and stands over seventeen feet tall. However, when the knight Calogrenant approaches the monstrous and bestial herdsman, he responds to Calogrenant’s inquiries in a direct and articulate manner:

Uns vileins qui resanbloit Mor,
leiz et hiedeus a desmesure,
einsi tres leide criature
ou’an ne porroit dire de boche.

assis s'estoit sor une coche,
 une grant maque en sa main....
 Totevoie tant m'anhardi
 que je li dis: 'Va, car me di
 se tu es boene chose ou non.'
 Et il me dist qu'il ert uns hom.
 'Quiex hom ies tu?'—'Tex com tu
 voiz; si ne sui autres nule foiz.'
 'Que fez tu ci?'—'Ge m'i estois
 et gart les bestes de cest bois'....
 (*Yvain* 288–293; 327–334)

This dialogue is revealing of the beastherd, Roger Bartra notes in *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*, “for underneath his grotesque ugliness and his complex exoticism lies a human being” (90). Without prodding from Calogrenant, the beastherd also volunteers the location of a nearby magical spring, beside which hangs a gong that when sounded releases a horrific thunderstorm—a worthy site of adventure for a knight errant such as Calogrenant. The beastherd’s perceptiveness and his friendly and accommodating behavior thus contrast dramatically with his monstrosity. Bernheimer hypothesizes that the “incongruous appearance of this wild man” would have appealed to the “rude sense of humor of his [Chrétien’s] noble listeners” (28).⁴⁵ Bartra, on the other hand, portrays Chrétien’s description of the ugly beastherd as one of “indulgent exoticism” (90). In either case, the beastherd’s fantastic hybridism and his seemingly incongruous behavior serve to startle the reader out of an easy representation of his character. The discord between the wild beastherd’s appearance and behavior interrupts logical thinking—the sign does not correspond to the signified in the anticipated manner.

Yvain himself also escapes to the woods and leads the life of a wild man for a period of time in *Yvain*. However, as Bartra stresses, Chrétien does not equate Yvain’s wildness with the wildness of the beastherd: “Chrétien... beautifully distinguishes Yvain’s style of wildness, when he becomes a wild man, from wild men *proper*, like the one who watches over the forest of the magic fountain” (90, emphasis original). In Yvain’s case, it is love madness that most directly motivates his wild behavior. Having been spurned by his lady love, Yvain flees society and wanders through the woods until saved by another lady. Bernheimer notes that love madness becomes a “fashionable reason for becoming a wild man” in medieval romances, affecting such renowned knights as Lancelot and Tristan, as well as Yvain (14).⁴⁶ The knight’s extremely agitated emotional state, his melancholy feelings and even irrational violence attest to the power of the great lady whose love the knight seeks, Bernheimer explains (14). If the lady does not return the knight’s amorous feelings, he severs all remaining ties with courtly society and takes to the woods, where, as Bernheimer also notes, a feminine touch often plays a role in the knight’s return to sanity and civilization: “They [the lovemad knights] find the wilderness the only environment congenial to their sense of disorientation. There they wander aimlessly

through the glades, subsisting on the raw flesh of animals or on the alms handed to them by pious hermits, until a miracle or the soothing touch of femininity restores them to reason" (14). In contrast to "wild men *proper*," then, the lovemad knight's wild condition is temporary; the lovemad knight returns to his normal state once he encounters the right lady or undergoes some kind of miraculous healing.

Bartra similarly emphasizes the significance of "amorous wrath" in Yvain's wild phase and rejects a structuralist reading of the episode, which would highlight in Yvain's madness the representation of the opposition of nature and culture. A structuralist reading would underscore the differing codes between the natural and civilized worlds, Bartra says: The "wild natural state" that Yvain falls into operates under its own set of codes ("nakedness, consumption of raw food, loss of memory, and life in the open") which differ from the codes of culture or of the civilized world (33). However, as Bartra points out, such a structuralist reading of the nature/culture opposition "*presupposes* the existence of two distinct orders" (133, emphasis original), overlooking the fact that the nature/culture opposition is itself "a cultural beast" (134). Furthermore, Bartra adds, the structuralist reading does not address the question of *why* the myth of the wild man was needed to mediate between the natural and cultural worlds, nor does it take into account the central role of love in these romances: "Clearly, the conceptual framework of structuralism has no place for love," Bartra states (135). In contrast, Bartra claims that the myth of the medieval wild man constitutes "part of the slow historical process by which a new cultural subjectivity...is formed" (137). According to Bartra's analysis of Yvain's wild madness, it is the notion of wildness itself that is most significant and that has played a central role in the formation of the Western conception of love: "Although, literarily, love precedes the wild condition, in the history of mythology it is the wild man who foreshadows the enamored man. As a result, the morbid symptoms of an unfulfilled love have contributed to shaping the image of eroticism as an irresistible force" (137). In Bartra's analysis, then, the wild man's madness has influenced deeply the Western image of passionate love even while the mythology of the wild man followed the amorous condition historically.

In *Les Noces barbares*, we find neither a physically monstrous wild man, like Calogrenant, nor a lovemad Yvain, but rather a dramatically neglected "wild child" named Ludovic who demonstrates signs of intelligence and potential in spite of the inhuman conditions in which he lives. Although Ludovic's mother Nicole has never touched or stroked him, nor has she expressed any affection toward him, even leaving him locked inside the attic for extended periods during his early childhood, he does show signs of intelligence. His "crazy" behavior appears an understandable response to the extreme emotional and physical neglect that he endures. In the following passage, Ludovic's cousin Nanette comments on his lively eyes and argues in favor of sending him to school, while his young mother, repeating the judgments of her own mother, upholds his worthlessness, insanity and bestiality:

'Je ne sais pas, moi! Faut qu'il apprenne et qu'il aille à l'école, ce gosse, au cathéchisme. On ne peut pas le laisser moisir dans un grenier. C'est pas suffisant que je vienne une fois la semaine!

—Maman dit qu'il a un grain. Il jette le poisson dans la cour quand on passe. Il met des fauteuils devant la porte et il pousse pour pas qu'on entre. Des fois même, il fait par terre.

—Et alors, il est malheureux, c'est tout!... Mais un grain sûrement pas. Regarde un peu les yeux vivants qu'il a. Moi je veux bien le reprendre a la maison.

—Maman dit qu'il faut pas. Qu'on est responsable s'il y a encore un pépin. Et qu'on est déjà bien assez embêté comme ça.'

Nanette libéra Ludo qui s'éloigna vers le fond de la piece et, le dos tourné, se mit a gratter au mur avec un vieux clou. (*Les Noces barbares* 39)

Nanette has little success in convincing the family to care for Ludovic. Their neglect continues throughout his life and the novel is punctuated by one heartbreaking disappointment after another. Nicole refuses to answer Ludo's letters when he does go away to school; she does not acknowledge holidays; nor does she communicate any tenderness for him, in spite of his own attempts to reach her.

Nicole's abandonment and abuse of her son are an effort on her part to deny his existence and thereby to erase the memory of the brutal rape from which she conceived him. Nicole's parents, Ludo's grandparents, support and fortify this strategy, as does the community at large. In reaction to his mother's emotional and physical withdrawal, Ludovic comes increasingly to fixate on her and to romanticize her. Thus, by the end of the novel when Ludo strangles his mother in a fit of passion, his violent actions seem comprehensible, if not rational and defensible. He is, as Paul Raymond Côté notes, a "monster" whose social creation is particularly transparent:

Ludovic Blanchard...becomes in turn the victim par excellence, rejected by all especially and most pitilessly by his mother who remains for him an obsessively magnified object of both idealization and fear. The inability of Nicole and her parents to overcome what they see as the shame and ridicule of the community leads them to blatantly negate the child's existence. Relegated to a garret, despoiled of any human affection or attention except that shown by Nicole's cousin, Nanette, Ludo slowly mutates into a monster of innocence and ignorance. ("Yann Queffélec" 337)

The juxtaposition of *Yvain* and *Les Noces barbares* highlights discrepancies between society's views, opinions or labels of an individual and the reader's perspective of that individual. These discrepancies call into question the notions of wildness, civility and civilization as they confront the opposition of man and beast, or the hierarchy of the human over the bestial.

In *Yvain* and in *Les Noces barbares*, neither the beastherd nor Ludovic reflects on his own monstrosity or behavior, yet the reader sees clearly through the mythology of their wildness. In *Yvain*, although the role of the beastherd is admittedly minimal, as a figure he sustains the reader's attention because of his fantastic hybridism and his relationship to the larger thematic of deformation and disequilibrium, which includes Yvain's own

period of lovmadness in the wilderness, the corruption of the court and other knights, and general social instability, and is amplified on a narrative level by Chrétien's frequent juxtaposing of opposites. The beastherd stands in contrast to this foregrounding of mental and social disequilibrium because, in spite of his bestial appearance, he responds in a stable, cogent fashion. Thus, the reflection of the hideous herdsman, were the reader to mount an imaginary mirror, would not be the image of a monster at all. His bestial hybridism appears as a kind of paradox, contradicting his "civilized" behavior and drawing into question the civility of the rest of society.

In *Les Noces barbares*, on the other hand, after having strangled his mother Ludo does not even seem to comprehend what he has done. He only realizes that "they" will come to get him again and will take his mother away from him. Without reflection, he dives from the boat that had become his home into the open sea, carrying his mother's body with him. In the closing lines, as he swims toward increasingly large waves, he begins to tire and become frightened: "Il commençait d'avoir mal au coeur, mal au corps, il respirait de plus en plus mal et frissonait d'épouvante a la vue des rouleaux qui blanchissaient l'ombre devant lui. 'J'ai peur', murmura-t-il en passant les deux bras autour de sa mère; puis il se laissa couler dans les remous qui menaient droit sur le déferlante" (344). Although he has just committed murder, Ludo's death is that of a tragic victim.

In their rejection and neglect of him, Nicole and her community have created of Ludovic "a monster of innocence" just as surely as Dr. Frankenstein created his monster. Whereas Ludovic lacks the critical perspective and therefore the remorse of Frankenstein's monster, the (melo)dramatic extent of his deprivation renders obvious to the reader the myth of his "wildness." In both instances—for the beastherd in *Yvain* and for Ludo in *Les Noces barbares*—their own bestiality and society's label of them as "wild" provide a critique of that society rather than a representative depiction of the character himself. In its nonrepresentation of their true nature, the monstrous hybridism of the beastherd and of Ludo poses a challenge to traditional structures of hierarchy and thinking.

CROSS-DRESSERS: LE ROMAN DE SILENCE AND L'ENFANT DE SABLE

Does being female constitute a 'natural fact' or a cultural performance, or is 'naturalness' constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the body through and within the categories of sex? (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* viii)

Hybridism evokes a blurring of categories and boundaries. It questions logical thinking and established order, both natural and social. While all of the hybrids that I have discussed, the werewolf, serpent-woman and wild man, destabilize traditional classificatory systems and identity, the figure of the cross-dresser most aggressively challenges the notion of sexual and generic unity. In the following three chapters of this study, I focus on the thirteenth-century romance, *Le Roman de Silence* by Heldris de

Cornuälle, and the contemporary novel, *L'Enfant de sable* (1985) by Tahar Ben Jelloun, as a means of exploring the extent to which the construction of gender is a performative act. I am particularly interested in the way in which the cross-dressed performances of the two hero(ine)s, Silence and Ahmed, are “discursively constrained,” determined by the accepted categories of their cultures. Butler’s suggestion that the “foundational categories of identity”—sex, gender, the body—may in fact be multiple, rather than binary, also finds echoes in the enigmatic character and narrative ambiguity that distinguish both of these works.

Finally, I conclude this study with a short synthesis of my findings in which I situate my work on French medieval and modern hybrid figures and narrative indeterminacy within the larger “monstrous frame” of the two periods.

CHAPTER 2

Passing for True

Gender as Performance in *Le Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*

In book nine of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid's narrator tells the tale of a cross-dressed child, Iphis. Before Iphis's birth, the child's father, Ligdus, informs his pregnant wife, Telethusa, that due to their limited means the infant she bears must be a boy. If she should happen to give birth to a girl, the infant will have to die. Telethusa begs her husband to change his mind, but his resolve remains firm. Near the end of Telethusa's term, she has a dream vision in which the goddess Isis speaks to her, advising her not to heed her husband's order and to raise the child, whether girl or boy. On the day of the child's birth, Telethusa hides the infant's biological sex from Ligdus:

Her labor pains grew more intense, and soon
she'd given easy birth: a girl was born.
Now, to deceive her husband, Telethusa
gave orders to the nurse (for she alone
knew of this guile) to feed the newborn child
and to tell everyone it was a son. (IX, 317–8)¹

Ligdus names the child after his own father, Iphis, which greatly pleases his wife because the name could refer to either a boy or a girl. The beautiful, cross-dressed Iphis, with her ambiguous name, grows up as a boy and receives a boy's education. By her thirteenth birthday, her father finds her a bride: the charming, golden-haired Ianthe. Iphis and Ianthe quickly fall in love with one another, but while Ianthe longs for their wedding day, Iphis laments her "monstrous pangs" (319). Several times, Telethusa manages to postpone the impending marriage, but finally she sees no other recourse than to pray to Isis for help. Only moments before the wedding, Isis miraculously transforms Iphis into a young man, thereby realigning Iphis's sex with her gender performance. Ianthe and Iphis wed as bride and groom.

Ovid's tale contains within it the founding kernel of both the thirteenth-century *Roman de Silence*, by Heldris de Cornuälle,² and the contemporary novel *L'Enfant de sable*, by

Tahar Ben Jelloun.³ The *Roman de Silence* is a 6,700-line Arthurian verse-romance from the second half of the thirteenth century, written in Old French, in the Picard dialect. It is the only known text by Heldris and survives in one manuscript (MS.Mi.LM.6, now located in the University of Nottingham) which was not rediscovered until the early twentieth century (1911). The contemporary Francophone Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun has written numerous essays, short stories, plays and novels, and has written and edited several collections of poems. *L'Enfant de sable* is his sixth novel. In 1987 he won the *Prix Goncourt* for *La Nuit sacrée*, a continuation of *L'Enfant de sable*. Ben Jelloun ostensibly wrote *La Nuit sacrée* in response to an outcry from his readers following the publication of *L'Enfant de sable*, begging him to clarify some of the ambiguities left unresolved in that novel.

In the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, as in the tale of Iphis, the father tells his pregnant wife that due to the laws governing inheritance, she must give birth to a boy. All three tales quickly establish the importance of male birth in strict patrilineal societies. In the *Roman de Silence* and in *L'Enfant de sable*, however, the mother does not conceal the infant's sex from the father; rather, each father independently conceives of the idea of raising a girl child as a boy. To an even greater extent than in the story of Iphis, the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* testify to the central role of the father, of patriarchal regimes of power and discourse, in the construction of gender within these two cultures.

As in the story of Iphis, no one, other than the parents and the nurse or caretakers,⁴ knows of the child's cross-dressed status. And, like Iphis, the two children, Silence and Ahmed, receive a boy's education and excel at the masculine pursuits of their culture. Their cross-dressed performances are entirely convincing within the narrative frame of the two works. Similarly also, adolescence brings to Silence and to Ahmed an awareness of their confused gender identity. Iphis's crisis revolves around the hopelessness and unnaturalness of her monstrous love for Ianthe:

Cows don't love cows, and mares do not love mares;
but sheep desire rams, and does are drawn
by stags. And birds, too, follow the same norm;
among the animals, no female wants
a female! Would I could annul myself! (319)

For Silence and Ahmed, neither of whom falls in love within their two tales, adolescence brings crises of conscience that force them to reevaluate their commitment to their secret performances. Silence begins to feel torn by conflicting thoughts, alternately deciding to stop this behavior,⁵ only to resolve again to pursue it.⁶ The narrator notes that navigating between these opposing perspectives is not an easy task:

Et qui oeuvre contre vouloir
Soyentes fois l'estuet doloir.
Silences ot le cuer diviers. (2679–81)

Silence's "divided" heart attests to the dissonance between his/her will and his/her actions. Ahmed, in turn, attempts to elude the "unspeakable truth" by avoiding mirrors which would otherwise force an encounter with his/her false image: "Alors, j'évite les miroirs. Je n'ai pas toujours le courage de me trahir, c'est à dire de descendre les marches que mon destin a tracées et qui me mènent au fond de moi-même dans l'intimité—insoutenable—de la vérité qui ne peut être dite" (44). For Silence and for Ahmed, adolescence compels a confrontation with his/her duplicitous performance; each responds by accepting his/her dual nature for the masculine advantages that it provides.

Unlike the story of Iphis, however, at the conclusions of the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* we find no miraculous last-minute bodily transformation or gender realignment. Silence and Ahmed do each assume the female gender, yet the specificity of this gender remains ambiguous. In Ovid's text, with its focus on the endless transformations of the physical world and the psychological results of this universal turbulence, the narrator highlights the transitions from one state of being to another. The *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, on the other hand, call into question the very notion of a unified subject or single state of being. Both works feature a debate between Nature and Nurture, or Culture, (explicit in the *Roman de Silence*, implied in *L'Enfant de sable*)⁷ concerning the relative strength of each in determining the *true* gender of the child—a debate that reflects and echoes Silence's and Ahmed's own struggles regarding their gender identity. Nevertheless, in spite of these debates, from birth through young adulthood neither Silence nor Ahmed is ever uniquely one gender or the other. Both texts stress their hybridism linguistically as well as thematically. In the *Roman de Silence*, for example, the narrator repeatedly refers to Silence as the boy-maiden, "li vallés mescine," or as the boy who is a maiden, "li vallés qui est mescine"⁸ and juxtaposes masculine and feminine gendered pronouns and nouns, as in this description of Silence's successful jousting match:

Moult le fist bien ens en l'arainne
 Entre ii. rens a la quintainne.
 Ainc feme ne fu mains laniere
 De contoier en tel maniere. (5145–8, my emphasis)

Similarly, in *L'Enfant de sable*, shortly before her death, Fatima, Ahmed's wife, succinctly summarizes their complicated gender relations by opposing gendered nouns and adjectives: "Je m'en vais... Je suis ta femme et tu es mon épouse... Tu seras veuf et moi..., disons que je fus une erreur" (80, my emphasis). In both works, the attention to Silence's and Ahmed's double status reveals two hero(ine)s⁹ whose power resides in their hybridism.¹⁰ Each embodies a fundamental indeterminacy that appears dangerously seductive. Within the two narratives and in numerous instances, other characters are so attracted to Silence and to Ahmed that the hero(ine)s are put in positions of real or potential peril.

In this study I will compare the manner in which the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* foreground indeterminacy both through the thematics of the cross-dresser and through their narratives. I will situate my analysis within the critical framework of a social constructivist theory of gender in order to highlight the constructedness of gender

at play within these two works and as a tool to deconstruct the essentialism of the binary opposition man/woman. From this perspective, I will then consider the extent to which social constructivism is itself an essentializing construct that operates “by essentializing essentialism” (Schor 43), whereas the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* move beyond such polarized feminist critical stances to begin to imagine a third space.¹¹ In neither text does this third space, this hybrid identity, emerge as trouble-free—it is no utopian liberation from the “prisonhouse” of the gender binary—but indicates an attempt to explore the limits of the traditional sex-gender categories and boundaries.¹²

Based on my analysis of cross-dressing in medieval and modern French narrative I will propose that the prevalence of transvestite and other hybrid figures, coupled with the extensive linguistic and narrative ambiguities in these texts, highlights the constant tension at play in this literature, as well as in the larger culture, revealed in our simultaneous attraction and resistance to binary categorization. In none of these works do we arrive at a tidy resolution, a simple, final Truth, either “in favor” or “opposed to” traditional binarism. Rather than viewing our fascination with cross-dressers and with other hybrid figures whose very existence indicates a transgression of binary categories as simply representing our awareness of the need to deconstruct traditional binary thinking, or, alternately, suggesting that the compulsive transgression of binary categories serves to confirm the intransigence of those categories in “our” psyches, I see a continuous push and pull between the two.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER

Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, takes as her subject the distinction between sex and gender, and the formulation of gender as a culturally constructed, performative act. She identifies drag and certain homosexual gender practices as among those that most dramatically exhibit the parodic and performative construction of gender (*Gender Trouble* viii).¹³ Looking back to Foucault and Nietzsche, Butler proposes a genealogical investigation of the price that we incur by positing the sex-gender binary as “natural, original and inevitable” (viii). Such an investigation must, she says, focus on “the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin” (viii–ix, italics original). Butler undertakes an examination of “compulsory heterosexuality” and of “phallogocentrism” as “regimes of power/ discourse,” investigating the points of convergence and of breakage between heterosexuality and phallogocentric culture, and asking how language itself produces the (“fictive”) construction of sex, which in turn maintains and upholds these very regimes of power (viii). She examines, then, the way in which cultural institutions and their language create the categories of identity that are necessary to support these institutions.

Butler’s reading of gender as a “discursively constrained performative act” elucidates in a particularly clear and revealing fashion the construction of gender of the hero(ine)s in the *Roman de Silence* and in *L’Enfant de sable*. Both texts highlight the critical role of regimes of power/discourse in the choice of the child’s gender, as the laws of patrilineal succession consciously and explicitly motivate each father’s decision to raise his child as

a male. Butler's study considers the way in which the adoption of a gender has become accepted, naturalized, in Western society; in these two texts, the "naturalness" (or not) of gender becomes one of the dominant questions driving the elaboration of the plot. Butler's work also stresses that the realization of the constructedness of gender must inevitably lead to a reevaluation of the degree to which scientific and medical discourses have defined the notion of biological "sex" itself.¹⁴ Far from being a prediscursive, "natural" fact, Butler argues that sex is "as culturally constructed as gender" (7). The essays on the *Roman de Silence* by Elizabeth Waters and Erin F. Labbie also draw heavily on the work of Butler. In "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternate Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*," Waters incorporates Butler's theory of the performativity of gender to apply queer theory to her reading of the romance. In "The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*," Labbie combines psychoanalytic theories with Butler's work on naming and identity formation from *Bodies That Matter* to propose that Silence's inner self, like his/her flexible Old French name, evades binary gender categorization and "becomes a representative of her own process of becoming" (74).

One advantage to a comparative study such as in this study is that the chronological and geographical distance between the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* offers insights into the variable construction of sex and gender within differing cultures and at different historical moments. That the cultural values of sex and gender do vary further affirms their constructedness. At the same time, since gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in these different historical contexts, and since gender intersects with other modalities of discursively constituted identities, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is produced and maintained (*Gender Trouble* 3).

The history of cross-dressing, and of the study of cross-dressing and transvestism, demonstrates that whereas cross-dressing has existed throughout time, attitudes toward this behavior have not remained constant. In the classical era, cross-dressing and cross-gender behavior were relatively widespread (Bullough, "Cross Dressing" 224). Bullough notes that Greek and Roman mythology and literature is "full of cross dressing of both men and women, while male individuals from Aeneas to Hercules are said to have lived part of their lives disguised as girls or women" ("Cross Dressing" 224). Cross-dressing also held an important role in the religious ceremonies of many of the early pagan cults of Aphrodite ("Cross Dressing" 224), but Christianity, following the Jewish scriptural tradition, prohibits wearing clothes of the opposite sex:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God. (Deuteronomy 22:5)

In *A Critical and Exegetical Comment on Deuteronomy*, S.R.Driver analyzes this prohibition as a reaction by early Jews against rival pagan ceremonies in which the goddess Atargatis was worshipped by cross-dressed men and women, rather than as a response to the sexual aspect of transvestism (250–51). Bullough finds, however, that during this period there was also some apprehension regarding the "sexual overtones" of cross-dressing: "Men were enjoined from using cosmetics, from wearing brightly colored

garments, from donning jewelry or ornaments associated with women, and from shaving the hair on the hidden parts of their bodies. Women were to keep their hair long and men were to keep their hair short" (*Sexual Variance* 80).

In spite of the Judeo-Christian prohibition, female cross-dressing was tolerated and even, when successful, admired, during the Middle Ages "because it was assumed that such women were striving to become more male-like and therefore better persons" (Bullough, "Cross Dressing" 225). St. Jerome indicates that the celibate, religious woman *becomes a man* by virtue of her holy behavior: "[As] long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from man as body is from soul. But when she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man" (567; Cited in "Cross Dressing" 227). For St. Jerome, a woman's 'becoming a man' through holy behavior is clearly a positive and admirable change.

Annie Woodhouse, a sociologist whose *Fantastic Women: Sex, Gender, and Transvestism* undertakes a feminist study of the social construction of gender, points to the Age of Reason as the moment when the view emerged of cross-dressing as irrational, immoral and deserving of punishment (22). However, other cultural historians have found documents describing the condemnation and persecution of male cross-dressers in the Middle Ages and earlier. Bullough cites hostility toward men who cross-dressed in the writings of St. Cyprian who was particularly "concerned about effeminacy among Christian men" ("Cross Dressing" 227).¹⁵ Kathleen Blumreich also notes the difference in medieval attitudes toward male and female cross-dressers, stemming from a perception of the superior role of the dominant man:

Whereas female transvestism was often tolerated because the woman was viewed as attempting to reach a more perfect (i.e., male) state, male transvestism was, even from classical times, derided and condemned. To dress in women's clothing was seen as evidence of a man's lack of virility, of his desire to play the effeminate partner. ("Lesbian Desire" 58)

Bullough states that historical female transvestism was relatively common during the Middle Ages. As evidence, Bullough cites the Church Council held at Gangra, before 341, which "condemned pious women who disguised themselves as men in order to join ascetic and monastic communities" ("Cross Dressing" 228). He adds that whereas the action was censured, the women were not punished: "Throughout the medieval period female cross dressers, with the major exception of Joan of Arc, were never prosecuted or penalized. Both the attempts of women to cross dress and the male toleration of it are strong evidence for the dominance of the male gender role in medieval Christianity" ("Cross Dressing" 228). The dominance of the male gender role created an environment in which female aspirations toward this role were understandable and even acceptable.

Blumreich adds that as male cross-dressing became increasingly associated with witchcraft in the later Middle Ages, male cross-dressers, like homosexuals, were considered "heretics" (58). Peter Allen explains that the use of the Old French "erite" or "herites"—the term that Queen Eufeme applies to Silence when he/she shuns her sexual advances (3935)—"derives its secondary meaning ('homosexual') from its primary meaning ('heretic')" (111, n. 12). Blumreich clarifies that "since Augustine and Aquinas had declared that 'unnatural sex acts' constituted 'injury to God' because they 'violated

the natural order prescribed by God' (Richards 142), homosexuals, like those engaging in bestiality or practicing nonorthodox forms of worship, were viewed as heretics" (56).¹⁶

A body of contemporary scholarship on cross-dressing has sought to reclaim the historical and literary cross-dresser as an intriguing, radical, free-spirited revolutionary rather than as the sexual pervert of much of the earlier literature.¹⁷ Some scholars have looked back to ancient Greece to examine transvestism and sex changes in Greek myths, and transvestism as a historical rite of passage. Bernard Sergent's *Homosexuality in Greek Myth* examines the "political undercurrent" of rereading the Greek myths. Approaching homosexuality not as a "monstrous innovation" but as a practice "institutionalized among Greek and other Indo-European peoples" (269), Sergent emphasizes the notion of "social gender" (54). In *Greek Homosexuality*, Kenneth Dover documents the sexual practices of upper-class Greek men. He supplements his study of literature with an extensive examination of vase painting and of legal documents. Scholars who advocate a social constructionist perspective of human sexuality often cite Dover's work, but he does not champion any one theoretical approach. P.M.C. Forbes Irving's *Metamorphoses in Greek Myth* includes consideration of "sex changes" and of the "shape shifters" in Greek mythology. Irving notes that for Augustine and for early scholars of Greek mythology, stories of metamorphosis presented theological problems: "These changes could not have been worked by a god, and yet devils have no power to change or create physical substance. Transformations are therefore illusions caused by devils," they reasoned (1). Irving does not find a radically different approach to stories of metamorphosis until the second half of the nineteenth century when anthropology and the comparative study of "primitive societies" give rise to a new perspective. Marie Delcourt's classic work, *Hermaphrodite: Mythes et rites de la bisexualité dans l'Antiquité classique*, catalogues Greek myths according to the sexuality of the principal characters. Delcourt identifies transvestism as a common rite of passage, for example in the initiation of youths and as a premarriage ritual.

Other scholars have sought to map out a historical overview of cross-dressing or to analyze cross-dressing as a sociocultural phenomenon. In addition to Garber's book *Vested Interests* (1992), which presents a study of historical and literary cross-dressers from Shakespeare to contemporary pop stars, Peter Ackroyd's *Dressing Up. Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession* (1972) is particularly noteworthy, examining much of the same material as Garber from a different perspective. Bullough's *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (1976) comprises a broad historical overview of sexual practice and attitudes, including Sumerian law codes, early Talmudic writings, Islamic beliefs concerning sexual behavior, and sexual theory in ancient China, as well as medieval and modern European perspectives. He incorporates material on cross-dressing in each section. Among early medieval female cross-dressers, Bullough discusses the story of saint Pelagia/Pelagius, whom he terms the "archetype for the female transvestite saints," other cross-dressing saints, such as saint Marina/Marinus, and the legendary Pope Joan (366–369). There are also case histories of European female-to-male transvestite soldiers and sailors (599–600), which he identifies as a fairly common phenomenon.¹⁸ Julie Wheelwright's *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness* and Jessica Amanda Salmonson's *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era* both also provide surveys of historical and literary fighting women, most of whom cross-

dressed, while Michele Perret states in her article, “Travesties et transsexuelles” that in French medieval narrative literature of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, transvestism occurs fairly often: “Les textes où un homme se déguise en femme, ou bien une femme en homme ne sont pas rares” (328).¹⁹ Additionally, Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol present in *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* an investigation into female cross-dressing, mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The authors refer to their own research as “not very systematic” and “far-from-exhaustive,” but it is well documented as well as highly readable. They argue that “such women should not be categorized as incidental human curiosities, but that their cross-dressing was part of a deeply rooted tradition” (1). Woodhouse stresses that transvestites have existed throughout much of western history: “Transvestism was found in ancient Greece, among the Roman emperors (notably Nero), the friends of Samuel Pepys and the French aristocracy of the eighteenth century” (22). Garber’s investigations highlight several French cross-dressers, including the eighteenth-century aristocrat, the Chevalier d’Eon, also known as Mademoiselle de Beaumont; Théophile Gautier’s “sexually enigmatic” hero(ine), Theodore de Serannes, in *Mademoiselle de Maupin*; La Zambinella, the cross-dressed (castrato) opera singer in Balzac’s *Sarrasine*; and Rose Sélavy, Michel Duchamp’s “female alter ego,” as well as historical, literary and cinematic cross-dressers of many other national origins (*Vested Interests* 73 and 161). Anthropological research has found that cross-dressing also constitutes an important ritual or rite of passage in many non-western societies.²⁰

Without a doubt, cross-dressing is a current hot topic in both academic and popular literature. Yet, in spite of the contemporary fascination with cross-dressing, scholars and experts do not agree on the definition of the phenomenon. Annie Woodhouse follows her explanation of the term “transvestism” (“Quite simply, transvestism means cross-dressing—from the Latin ‘trans’ cross, ‘vestire’ to dress” [ix–x]) with a further distinction that defines the transvestite as a kind of cross-dresser with a purpose:

Not all cross-dressers are transvestites. There are drag queens, professional female impersonators, transsexuals and cross-dressed prostitutes, but the transvestite cross-dresses not for money, entertainment, politics, nor because he is convinced that he really is a woman. He does it from perceived need, often expressed as compulsion, and because he enjoys it. Transvestism represents a wholesale transgression of the ‘rules’ of gender in a manner which is both direct and extraordinary. (x)

Woodhouse attempts to pinpoint satire as the key element that separates cross-dressing from transvestism. According to Woodhouse, cross-dressed performers may enact parodies of feminine behavior, whereas transvestites make “no attempt at satire” (18), but she notes the difficulty in maintaining a rigid distinction between the two (19). Garber, on the other hand, abdicates to the preferences of the transvestite-transsexual (TV-TS) community, for whom, she says “transvestite” is a more clinical term (it “seems to imply a compulsive disorder”), whereas “cross-dresser” implies greater agency (it “suggests a choice of lifestyle”) (4).

Woodhouse further refines her definition of transvestism by restricting application of this term to men, noting that it often includes sexual fetishes (which, presumably, women do not have) and has as its ultimate goal the ability to “pass” as a woman. On the other hand, when women dress as men, according to Woodhouse, they do so because it is fashionable: “She is simply following a trend” (x–xi). In contrast, Garber devotes an entire chapter of her book to female-to-male transvestites, emphatically debunking the myth that restricts fetishistic transvestism to males (“Cross-dress for Success,” *Vested Interests* 41–66). The existence of practical “how-to” guides, such as *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual*²¹ also belies Woodhouse’s restriction.

Unlike the other hybrid figures mentioned in my introductory chapter—werewolves, wild men and serpent-women—real cross-dressers live in the real world, as well as in that of literature and film, which considerably extends the range of their relevance. From medical and scientific studies that seek to understand the psychological and biological foundations of the condition, or report on the relative successes of treatments and cures,²² to popular biographies and testimonials from transvestites themselves,²³ contemporary interest in cross-dressing runs from the highly technical to the highly sensational. Much of the work on cross-dressing “straddles” spheres of interest so that even the research on the topic defies easy categorization. For example, Garber, who is the William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English and the Director of the Humanities Center at Harvard University, published her book *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* in 1992.²⁴ Shortly after the publication of this “erudite”²⁵ book, Garber appeared on Geraldo Rivera’s television talk show²⁶ as a “sexpert” for a program on “Women Who Dress as Men,” in which Geraldo interviewed five panelists regarding intimate aspects of their personal lives and their motivations for cross-dressing.

Garber herself identifies the contemporary fascination with cross-dressing with an epistemological crisis, “an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking” (*Vested Interests* 10–11). She analyzes our attraction to cross-dressing as an awareness of the need to deconstruct long-accepted divisions and categories which cross-dressing, in its challenge to gender binarism, makes readily—sometimes spectacularly—apparent. She acknowledges the appeal of cross-dressing to contemporary literary and cultural critics as a “sign of the constructedness of gender categories” but warns against looking “through” rather than “at” the cross-dresser, appropriating him or her for particular critical aims, or assimilating the cross-dresser to one pole or another of the gender binarism (*Vested Interests* 9–10). The power of this “third sex,” she stresses, lies in the cross-dresser’s resistance to either/or thinking: “The ‘third’ is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crises.... [It] is *not* a term. Much less is it a *sex*.... The ‘third’ is a mode of articulation, a way of describing a space of possibility” (*Vested Interests* 11). For Garber, then, the cross-dresser represents the potential for constituting an alternative gender that defies assimilation.

The sexologist Magnus Hirschfield was the first to employ the term “transvestite” in a medical context in 1910²⁷ (Bullough, “Cross Dressing” 223). From the early endocrinological work of Hirschfield and, later, Harry Benjamin, scientific approaches to cross-dressing have expanded to include the medico-psychiatric and the sociopsychological, in which the researcher may begin to consider not only the causes of and treatment for cross-dressing, but also the assumptions about gender that have formed the basis of earlier research models: the “politics of diagnosis.”²⁸

At the foundation of these assumptions about gender lies an unreflective acceptance of gender as biologically determined. According to this model, sex-gender identity originates in the body itself, and thus any deviation from the standard, heterosexual sex-gender orientation must be due to a biological, hormonal or chromosomal abnormality. In the act of cross-dressing, however, the transvestite disrupts the theoretical primacy of the body as the locus of identity, and indicates the possibility of an eventual noncorrespondence between sex and gender. That is, in the adoption of a gender that does not correspond to his or her biological sex, the cross-dresser forces us to examine the extent to which gender is socially constructed and to interrogate the prevailing ideologies that underlie this construction.²⁹ Judith Butler summarizes the radical potential of the realization of this sex-gender distinction or split:

The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one. (*Gender Trouble* 6, emphasis original)

As the cross-dresser destabilizes the binary gender system, he/she facilitates a critique of the structures that engender within a given culture—structures that, of course, develop variously in different historical contexts.

THE LAW OF THE FATHER

In the *Roman de Silence*, due to a prior controversy surrounding a female inheritance claim, King Ebain has ruled that women can no longer inherit in his kingdom. Because of this ruling, Silence's father determines, before his wife has given birth, to raise their child as a boy regardless of the child's sex. Historically, there is some precedent in medieval England for the abolition of cognatic succession. Although a daughter or daughters generally could inherit if there were no sons, Helen Jewell notes in *Women in Medieval England* that the specifics of such inheritance were highly contradictory and controversial:

In feudal inheritance whereas an eldest son was heir to the main body of the estate even if he had younger brothers or sisters, by c. 1135 the eldest daughter was totally ousted as an heiress as soon as she had a brother, and if there was no brother, her inheritance was still diminished with the arrival of each younger sister, who became another coheiress. (22)³⁰

In medieval France, according to Shulamith Shahar in *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, although laws barred women from holding any public office not held as a fief, or from participating in government institutions, there was no such

restriction against inheritance: women did inherit fiefs and thus occasionally even ruled over territories (11–12). Georges Duby, however, in *Le Chevalier, la Femme et le Prêtre* traces a change in attitudes toward marriage from the tenth and early eleventh centuries, when warriors and kings may have abducted their brides as often as they arranged to marry them, to the thirteenth century, when marriage had become a sacrament. According to Duby, these changes in attitudes toward marriage had a strong influence on inheritance as well. Duby identifies the institution of the marriage system as paralleling the construction of hierarchical political, ecclesiastical and economic systems. As knights became increasingly concerned with preserving their seigneurial properties, they began to prevent the division of inheritance by limiting the marriages of their sons and by restricting the dowries and marriages of their daughters.

Within the narrative frame of the *Roman de Silence*, the royal restriction against female inheritance creates a socioeconomic necessity that motivates the need to disguise an infant's sex, to raise a girl as a boy. Before Silence's birth, the narrator tells us that Nature has used a special set of molds to create the most beautiful and perfect girl possible. She (Nature) attends to every detail and inscribes Silence's features on her face:

Les orelles li fait petites
Nature, ki les a escrites,
Les sorcils brun et bien seöir,
Nul hom ne puet si bials veöir. (1917–20)³¹

The narrator establishes for Silence an unambiguous genesis and originary (female) body/sex prior to its cultural inscription. In *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance*, Claude Luttrell explains that the figure of Nature as creator of beauty and perfection, a familiar topos in Old French poetry and in the works of the Latin poets of the twelfth century, had become common also in vernacular literature by the time of Chrétien de Troyes (2).³² R.Howard Bloch asserts, furthermore, that Heldris must have been directly familiar with Alain de Lille's *De planctu Naturae* because of the striking similarities between the two texts in the linking of creation and textual production, rhetoric and social deviance (Bloch, "Silence and Holes" 84–5).

At the moment of Silence's birth, her father sees and acknowledges her sex and is "greatly pleased" with her beauty:

Li cuens s'en a forment vanté,
Qu'il ne donroit mie une tille
Desolte a un fil de sa fille,
Car ainc ne vit si bieles cose. (2028–31)

According to the narrator, in no way did Cador feel disappointed by Silence's sex; he would not have preferred to have had a real son, in spite of his intention to make of this child a "boy."

In *L'Enfant de sable*, a Moroccan father of seven girls, awaiting the birth of an eighth child, decides that this one *will* be a boy. The father, Hadj Ahmed, is himself the oldest and wealthiest of his siblings. The narrator explains that within the Islamic religion, girls can inherit only one-third of their father's wealth and possessions. If there is no male progenitor, the remainder of the inheritance passes to the father's brothers: "Notre religion est impitoyable pour l'homme sans héritier; elle le dépossède ou presque en faveur des frères. Quant aux filles, elles reçoivent seulement le tiers de l'héritage. Donc les frères attendaient la mort de l'aîné pour se partager une grande partie de sa fortune" (18). Nikki R. Keddie discusses in her introduction to *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* the Quran's legalization of female inheritance (half that of a male heir), which had been unknown in the pre-Islamic Middle East.³³ The inheritance rules, however, tend to be interpreted "in a more patriarchal way by Islamic law," according to Keddie (5). This "more patriarchal way" translates into that which most benefits the men involved: "In general, the Quran was followed when it was not too inconvenient to men or to the patriarchal family to do so, and not followed when it was" (5). David S. Powers notes in his book, *Studies in Qur'an and Hadith: The Formation of the Islamic Law of Inheritance*, that difficulties in modernizing the original Quranic verses further complicated interpretation of inheritance law.³⁴ Powers demonstrates that when later theologians and jurists chose one of several possible readings as the authoritative version, they often opted for interpretations in accordance with the cultural climate of their own time, rather than the connotations that the same passage would have had when first written, during the early Muslim period.

Ahmed's father's decision to raise his child as a son is, thus, in part an effort to retain his fortune within his immediate family. At the same time, there is a strong sense of the necessity to have a son to prove the father's masculinity. The narrator states that the father considers his wife "sterile" since she has not yet given him a son, and that he cultivates toward his daughters, "non pas de la haine, mais de l'indifférence" (17). His wife, too, views the birth of each daughter as a defeat and a cause for self-chastisement. The narrator describes her sense of disappointment and resentment at each birth: "Mais à chaque naissance toute la joie retombait brutalement. Elle se mettait elle aussi à se désintéresser de ses filles. Elle leur en voulait d'être là, se détestait et se frappait le ventre pour se punir" (19). When Ahmed is born, her mother, seeing her sex, begins to cry. The child's father, however, denies her anatomy. Holding the naked infant in his arms, he attempts to console his wife, praising the infant's masculinity: "Pourquoi ces larmes? J'espère que tu pleures de joie! Regarde, regarde bien c'est un garçon! Plus besoin de te cacher le visage. Tu dois être fière.... Tu viens après quinze ans de mariage de me donner un enfant, c'est mon premier enfant, regarde comme il est beau, touche ses petits testicules, touche son penis, c'est déjà un homme" (26–27). For the father there is no conflict between Ahmed's sex and his assumption of the male gender because, in the father's own mind, he has already constructed his masculinity. The narrator questions the father's seeming self-deception, wondering whether he has forgotten that he himself engineered the birth of a "son," or whether he is pretending: "Il avait bien vu une fille, mais il croyait fermement que c'était un garçon" (27).

In both the *Romance de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, the economic and social settings provide a rationalization for Silence's and Ahmed's cross-dressing. To an extent, Silence and Ahmed appear as victims—innocent victims of the social conditions into

which they were born, and victims of their fathers' unconventional solutions. Their cross-dressing is normalized; it is part of a "progress narrative," a narrative that explains an individual's cross-dressing as the result of the benefits or progress that it brings.³⁵ In each text, the birth daughter inherits cross-dressing as a strategy that will enable *her* to inherit *her* father's wealth. In no way does Silence or Ahmed's cross-dressing imply a "lifestyle choice" or any kind of "alternative" sexual desire. Michele Perret notes that in general, in French medieval narrative fiction of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the cause of transvestism differs for women and for men: Men usually cross-dress in order to have access to the woman they desire, whereas women do so in order to benefit from masculine privilege, such as inheritance, or to be able to travel alone.³⁶ Perret emphasizes that asexual transvestism typifies female-to-male cross-dressing in this literature (329).³⁷ Perret has also identified the instrumental role of the father in the transvestism of all four of the medieval, female-to-male transvestites that she studies: Silence, Grisandole (*L'Estoire de Merlin*), Yde (Huon de Bordeaux's *Yde et Olive*), and Blanchandine (*Tristan de Nanteuil*) (331–2).³⁸

Garber interprets the normalization of cross-dressing that results from explicitly framing it within a socioeconomic register as a means of "explaining away" the cross-dresser, of dismissing the behavior as a kind of "cultural symptom" "rather than an erotic pleasure and play space" (69–70). In the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, however, whereas each work goes to some length initially to normalize cross-dressing as a necessary strategy for dealing with an unjust patriarchal economic system, much of the focus of the remainder of the stories revolves around the way in which this performance plays out.

INSCRIPTION: NAMING AND CLOTHING

Although Silence's father declares at her birth that she is a beautiful girl, he has her baptized as a boy. The baptism is a delicate process in itself that entails inventing a story that the infant is gravely ill so that the priest will baptize him/her quickly, without removing his/her wrappings. Silence's father chooses the Latin name of Scilentius, reasoning that if his/her "true nature" is ever discovered, they will change the unnatural final -us to an -a in her Latin name³⁹ and Scilentia will assume her natural female gender:

Se nos le tolons dont cest -us
 Nos li donrons natural us,
 Car cis -us est contre nature,
 Mais l'altres [Scilentia] seroit par nature. (2079–82)

In a literal manner, the naming of Scilentia thus discursively constructs or genders his/her body. Her "true nature" appears as a blank slate, a passive surface, on which the naming acts (genders), but which it does not ultimately change—for she can quickly and easily assume (resume) her "natural" female gender if need be.

Noting that the suffix *-us* not only marks the ending of a Latin nominative but signifies also “custom” or “tradition,” Kate Mason Cooper refers to Silence’s Latin name, Scilentius, as “a form of hiding or disguise” (347): the *-us* suffix conceals her feminine nature, replacing it with masculine customs. Perret develops this line of thinking by reading a deeper level of meaning into the feminine *-a*, as well as the masculine *-us*, that parallels the division between Nature and Nurture: “Si l’on a bien repéré dans ces quatre vers que le suffixe *-us* représente l’usage, la culture (*Noretur*), on n’a pas toujours vu que *-a*, troisième personne du verbe avoir, représente ce que la fillette possède réellement de par Nature: son identité sexuelle” (335). R.Howard Bloch, however, disagrees with this straightforward association of the Latin gendered suffixes with Nature and Nurture. He points out that in later passages Silence describes the *-us* as against *both* custom (“Por cho que l’us est encontre us” [2541]) and nature (“Car cis us n’est pas natureus” [2554]) (Bloch 86). Nonetheless, as Peter Allen emphasizes, Silence’s parents do not actually call him/her by either of the gendered Latin variants. They use instead the French version of the name which designates no gender at all: “The French name the child’s parents choose for her masks with the genderless desinence *-e* the choice they would have been forced to make in Latin: ‘Silence’ is a nominal zero, a placeholder for a name” (105–6). But whereas Allen sees an absence in Silence’s genderless name, which he relates to the theme of the lack of language or speech, I would assert a presence. The name ‘Silence’ incorporates *both* genders; it successfully negotiates the need to choose one or the other.

For Ahmed, as for Silence, the public construction of a masculine gender begins with his naming. Ahmed’s father, however, builds in no concessions for an eventual return to a female form. He names “him” Mohamed Ahmed. The narrator in *L’Enfant de sable*, speaking to the “audience” listening to his tale, maintains that the specific name is, in fact, unimportant: “Tu dis qu’il faut l’appeler Khémaïss? Non, qu’importe le nom. Bon, je continue...” (17).⁴⁰ Yet, certainly the name *is* important. Ahmed, who carries his father’s name, carries on the family line, wealth and tradition. “A,” the first letter of the Roman alphabet, is especially symbolic since Ahmed’s father feels that after the birth of seven daughters Ahmed is his first born child. The name Ahmed increases in symbolic weight when, later in the story, Ahmed takes the female name Zahra. “A” and “Z,” the first and last letters, lie on “opposite” ends of the alphabet, yet Ahmed comes to embody them both.⁴¹ Frequently in the course of his/her own tale, Ahmed will comment on his/her hybrid identity: “Je vis des deux côtés du miroir,” he/she says (57).

As in the *Roman de Silence*, the ritualization of this interpellation poses problems in *L’Enfant de sable* concerning the infant’s anatomy. Just as Silence’s father must devise a scheme to have him/her baptized without anyone seeing his/her body, Ahmed’s father must arrange for Ahmed’s circumcision. In this case, Ahmed’s father has his own finger “circumcised” in place of his son’s/daughter’s penis, by slipping it discreetly between the infant’s spread legs:

Figurez-vous qu’il a présenté au coiffeur-circonciseur son fils, les jambes écartées, et que quelque chose a été effectivement coupé, que le sang a coulé, éclaboussant les cuisses de l’enfant et le visage du coiffeur. L’enfant a même pleuré et fut comblé de cadeaux apportés par toute la famille. Rares furent ceux qui remarquèrent que le père avait un pansement autour de l’index de la main droite. (32)

That no one notices this “sleight of hand” attests to the power of the law of the father in the construction of Ahmed’s gender.

Once Silence and Ahmed are baptized or “circumcised,” their parents hide their bodies underneath boys’ clothes and have each educated as a boy. Their clothing, like their naming, thus constitutes their gender in a seemingly straightforward manner. Again, in the *Roman de Silence*, the gendering worked by clothes and education is social and superficial. The narrator of *Silence* describes this process, specifying that they clothed Silence in men’s clothes (appropriately sized) in order to deny her nature:

Quant le enfes pot dras user,
 Por se nature refuser
 L’ont tres bien vestu a fuer d’ome
 A sa mesure, c’est la some. (2359–2362)

But the narrator claims that Silence’s boyish clothes leave intact the body underneath:

El a en tine que ferine:
 Il est desos les dras mescine. (2479–80)

Perret notes that the narrator of the *Roman de Silence* creates a distinction between exterior and interior appearance. She states that Silence’s assumption of the male gender also transforms his/her skin or complexion, but not the interior reality. Perret cites seven occurrences of the rhyme “halle/malle” (suntan/male) within the text that underscore this transformation and the association of masculinity with his/her exterior appearance (Perret 332). Silence’s suntanned skin is particularly distressing to Nature since she had prided herself on her creation in Silence of the perfect complexion—a delicate mixture of red and white. However, other than these references to Silence’s more tanned or ruddy complexion, both the narrator and Silence him/herself maintain that Silence’s body remains unchanged by *her* assumed gender. Silence’s conscience speaks to him/her at night, reminding Silence that his/her appearance and physical body do not correspond:

Ti drap qu’as vestut, et li halles,
 Font croire as gens que tu iés malles.
 Mais el a sos la vesteüre
 Ki de tolt cho n’a mie cure. (2827–30)

The lack of correspondence between his/her body and gender performance will later underscore for Silence the duplicitous nature of his/her endeavor and give him/her cause for concern.

Ahmed’s caretakers, like Silence’s, dress him/her as a boy. As puberty approaches, however, Ahmed writes in his/her journal that his/her mother takes additional

vestimentary precautions against the development of breasts, by binding his/her chest tightly with white linen: “Elle s’inquiétait pour ma poitrine qu’elle pensait avec du lin blanc; elle serrait très fort les bandes de tissu fin au risque de ne plus pouvoir respirer. Il fallait absolument empêcher l’apparition des seins” (36). Apparently this method works for Ahmed as he/she never does develop breasts, and in fact imagines that his/her breasts are growing inward, pointing inside his/her chest, even impeding his/her respiration: “Ma poitrine était toujours empêchée de poindre. J’imaginais des seins qui poussaient à l’intérieur, rendant ma respiration difficile. Cependant, je n’eus pas de seins.... C’était un problème en moins” (48). The narrator’s adherence to an interior/exterior contrast in the *Roman de Silence* is more problematic in *L’Enfant de sable*. Both texts establish an inner/outer opposition that parallels the oppositions between sex and gender, and nature and nurture. Both texts further present these binary oppositions as originary and prediscursive, but whereas Silence’s *true* interior nature remains distinct from and unaffected by his/her ruddy complexion and masculine behavior, Ahmed’s inwardly pointing, interior (virtual?) breasts insinuate a transgression of his/her performance into the interior.

Judith Butler highlights the parallels between precisely these binary distinctions (*Gender Trouble* 129). Briefly tracing the opposing figures of body/mind, nature/culture, and sex/gender through Christian and Cartesian thought,⁴² she undertakes an examination of the means by which society marks the boundaries of the body to create of it the naturalized, passive surface upon which culture inscribes its values:

‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ make sense only with reference to a mediating boundary that strives for stability. And this stability, this coherence, is determined in large part by cultural orders that sanction the subject and compel its differentiation from the abject. Hence, ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ constitute a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject. When that subject is challenged, the meaning and necessity of the terms are subject to displacement. If the ‘inner world’ no longer designates a topos, then the internal fixity of the self and, indeed, the internal locale of gender identity, becomes similarly suspect. (134)

Butler also questions the social and discursive rewards of such a construction: “From what strategic position in public discourse,” she asks, “and for what reasons has the trope of interiority and the disjunctive binary of inner/outer taken hold?” (134). As Silence and Ahmed approach adolescence, the “internal fixity” of their selves comes onto shaky ground as they question the “internal locale” of their gender identity. We may not yet be able to pinpoint the “strategic position” or the reasons for this trope of interiority, but the characters’ acute distress as they come increasingly to realize the *lack* of correspondence inherent in their performative hybridism reveals to the reader the high cultural stakes involved in upholding these binary oppositions.

ADOLESCENCE: THE CHALLENGE TO A DUAL GENDER IDENTITY

In the *Roman de Silence*, the onset of puberty inspires a heated debate about the location of sexual difference. In the text, Nature and Nurture each challenge the other's right to determine Silence's gender identity. After Silence's twelfth birthday, Nature comes to him/her with strong criticism for the manner in which Silence has wronged her (Nature), wasting the great beauty that Nature had bestowed on Silence. Nature controverts the truth-value of Silence's outward appearance and behavior and attempts to persuade Silence to give up this masculine performance and resume her "natural" female gender (2500–29). Nature concludes her harsh speech by denying Silence's masculine identity:

Tu nen es pas Scilentius! (2530)

Initially, Silence reacts in defense of this identity, interpreting his/her name, Scilentius, as equivalent to his/her identity:

Tel n'oï onques!
Silencius! qui sui jo donques?
Silencius ai non, jo cui,
U jo sui altres que ne fui. (2531–4)

Silence concludes in a straightforward and logical manner that he/she cannot be anyone other than who he/she knows, so he/she *must* be Scilentius, or else he/she is no one:

Mais cho sai jo bien, par ma destre,
Que je ne puis pas altres estre!
Donques sui jo Scilentius,
Cho m'est avis, u jo suis nus.⁴³ (2535–8)

Silence's conviction of his/her identity here stresses the direct correspondence of name to identity. Yet, although Silence analyzes Nature's statement as a rhetorical trick, his/her certainty and self-defense soon give way to doubt. Silence convinces him/herself that Nature's argument is plausible, saying:

Por cho che l'-us est encontre us
N'a pas a non Scilentius.
Aler en violt a la costure

Si com li a rové Nature,
Car por fief, ne por iretage,
Ne doit mener us si salvage. (2541–46)

The adolescent Silence, apprised of his/her conflicted gender identity, now concurs with Nature's analysis that the masculine suffix *-us* opposes traditional gendered behavior and is therefore barbarous. Nothing, Silence concludes, could be worth such falsity and deception, not even his/her father's inheritance. Persuaded, Silence agrees to give up his/her masculine ways and to resume *her* "natural" identity, even returning to her sewing—the proper, domestic activity for medieval women.

Nurture soon enters the debate and chastises Nature for attempting to convince Silence to give up his/her masculine ways. Nurture repudiates Nature's influence over Silence, and claims to have completely denatured Silence. Nurture further asserts that culture easily overpowers nature in influencing human behavior, saying to Nature:

Jo l'ai tolte desnaturee.
N'avra ja voir a vus duree
Se ne lassciés icest anter
Bien vos porés al loig vanter
Se jo ne fac par noretur
.m. gens ovrer contre nature. (2595–2600)

Nurture argues that Silence's gender performance is itself the locus of her gender identity, and seems to claim additionally that this cultural construct has completely replaced, or transformed, any kind of original essence or nature ("Je l'ai *tolte* desnaturee," [2595, my emphasis]). Nurture makes no mention of any past or potential conflict between Silence's physical body and her gender performance. Silence's biological sex does not stand in the way of his/her masculine behavior. It would seem that for Nurture, the physical body is *immaterial*—it has no bearing on Silence's identity or nature.

The stances of Nature and of Nurture in this debate put Silence in an understandably awkward position: while Nature proposes a strict essentialist view of gender identity that underscores Silence's essential femininity, Nurture presents a social constructivist perspective that identifies Silence's gender as masculine because Silence has been constructed as male. As each allegorical figure attempts to argue for a fixed definition of gender identity, Silence fluctuates alternately from one perspective to the other. Nature and Nurture strive to force Silence into a single gender identity, but Silence resists easy categorization. Much like Garber's *bad readers* who "erase" or "look through" the cross-dresser, resisting the power of "blurred gender" (*Vested Interest* 6), Nature and Nurture work to reposition Silence away from his/her hybrid third space. Ultimately, Reason, a third allegorical figure, persuades Silence that the advantages of her masculine performance merit his/her perseverance.

Counseled by Reason, Silence chooses to persist in his/her masculine performance for the material advantages of a male identity. He/she sees the folly of relinquishing his/her superior position now that he/she is *on top*:

Et poise dont en son corage
 Tolt l'us de feme a son usage,
 Et voit que miols valt li us d'ome
 Que l'us de feme, c'est la some.
 'Voire, fait il, a la male eure
 Irai desos, quant sui deseure.' (2635–40)

Significantly, it is Silence's remembrance of "the games that people play in private" ("Des jus c'on siolt es cambres faire" [2633]) that most directly prompts this realization of his/her superior position in the male role. The threat of intimate relations also leads Silence to detail his/her physical inadequacies as a woman and to state that he/she does not want to be "beaten" at these private games or to lose his/her honor. By Silence's own admission, he/she knows nothing of the ways of women, nor does he/she have a feminine appearance or (exterior) physique. Silence self-identifies as a male:

Trop dure bouche ai por baisier,
 Et trop rois bras por acoler.
 On me poroit tost afoier
 Al giu c'on fait desos gordine
 Car vallés sui et nient mescine.
 Ne voel perdre ma grant honor
 Ne la voel cangier a menor. (2646–52)

In spite of Silence's own female sex, Silence here states that he/she would be shamed if he/she tried to adopt a female gender:

Or sui jo moult vallans et pros.
 Nel sui, par foi, ains sui honis
 Quant as femes voel estre onis. (2642–44)

Silence's lack of familiarity with the appropriate behavior for women would lead to his/her disgrace. For Silence, his/her male gender is now considerably more significant than his/her female sex in the construction of his/her identity.

Although the advantageous position that his/her masculine role provides finally does sway Silence, the narrator stresses that Silence's resolve is not free of tension. Praising

Silence's perseverance while acknowledging "his" moments of hesitation and inner conflict, the narrator states:

Jo ne di pas qu'il ne pe[n]sast
 Diversement, et ne tenast
 Diverse cogitation
 Com enfant de tel natiön,
 Meësmement enfant si tendre
 Ki doit a tel usage entendre. (2661–6)⁴⁴

The narrator's description of Silence's conflicting reflections and inner turmoil implies that in spite of Silence's resolve, he/she suffered from the dissonance between his/her "interior" and "exterior" self, sex and gender, body and mind, which underscores in turn the difficulties that such discord poses within this cultural context. Butler, discussing interior/exterior discord in Western culture in general, states: "It is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized" (*Gender Trouble* 136).

In *L'Enfant de sable*, Ahmed's adolescence further confuses his/her easy assignment to one or another binary gender category. Sarah Skrainka points out that the narrative underscores this increased difficulty in categorization as it refers to the chapter on Ahmed's adolescence as leading *nowhere*:

Il est intéressant de noter que le chapitre 4, qui traite de l'adolescence de Ahmed-Zahra, porte le titre 'la porte de samedi.' Celle-ci représente une porte 'percée dans le mur' qui 'ne mène nulle part' (41). Or, l'adolescence doit marquer, normalement, une transition entre l'enfance et l'âge adulte, et surtout elle se caractérise par la différenciation physique et sociale des sexes. C'est-à-dire, fille ou garçon, l'adolescent acquiert le rôle que la société réserve aux êtres de son sexe. Cependant ici il s'agit d'un voyage qui ne mène nulle part. (4)

Although Ahmed never develops (exterior) breasts, he/she does begin to menstruate. Initially, Ahmed attempts to deny the existence of his/her menses, to pretend it is a dream, a vision: "Ce n'était peut-être pas du sang, mais une veine enflée, une varice colorée par la nuit, une vision juste avant la lumière du matin" (46). However, he/she must acknowledge the physical reality of this blood. Ahmed's first menses seems to challenge *his* image and to betray the falsity of *his* performance: "Et le sang un matin a touché mes draps. Empreintes d'un état de fait de mon corps enroulé dans un linge blanc, pour ébranler la petite certitude, ou pour démentir l'architecture de l'apparence" (46). This menstrual blood, which originates in Ahmed's "interior" body and traverses the boundary of the body to the "exterior," disrupts the coherence of Ahmed's male performance and draws into question Ahmed's internalization of his/her male gender identity.

For Ahmed, the suggestion that his/her construction may be nothing more than a façade is a profoundly disturbing one. Ahmed's choice of an architectural metaphor is

significant. In the immediately preceding passage, he/she has also borrowed an architectural metaphor to emphasize the difficulty of his/her hybrid existence: "O mon Dieu, que cette vérité me pèse! dure exigence! dure la rigueur. Je suis l'architecte et la demeure; l'arbre et la sève; moi et un autre; moi et une autre" (46). In Ahmed's turmoil, he/she feels torn between a series of opposing pairs, as he/she alternately identifies with both the architect and the edifice, both the designer and the design, both the tree and the sap, and with both a masculine and a feminine Other who inhabit him/her. As Ahmed struggles to situate him/herself in one or another of these opposing positions, the imprecision and unruliness of his/her dual condition trouble him/her deeply.

For Ahmed, the first menses also serves as a reminder of lost opportunities, of the life that he/she could have led: "C'était bien du sang; résistance du corps au nom; éclaboussure d'une circoncision tardive. C'était un rappel, une grimace d'un souvenir enfoui, le souvenir d'une vie que je n'avais pas connue et qui aurait pu être la mienne" (46). This blood represents to Ahmed a kind of physical rebellion, a female circumcision—evidence of his/her body's resistance to its name. Much like Cixous's "sorties,"⁴⁵ the menstrual blood's exit from Ahmed's body seems to signify both an escape of Ahmed's female sex from or through the body, and an attack on the body.

In silence and secrecy, Ahmed helps him/herself to the supply of rags, piled in a cupboard that he/she had seen his/her mother and sisters use. Ahmed thus publicly maintains appearances, while suffering privately this betrayal of his/her own body. Once Ahmed's cycle has ended, having expelled this blood, this abject Other, he/she returns to himself: "Après l'avènement du sang, je fus ramené à moi-même et je repris les lignes de la main telles que le destin les avait destinées" (48). As Julia Kristeva has demonstrated in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, the designation as "abject" of expelled substances and the concomitant delineation of bodily boundaries constitute critical steps in subject formation. Butler states, after Kristeva: "The boundary of the body as well as the disjunction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness" (*Gender Trouble* 133). With Ahmed's rejection of this blood, he/she clearly attempts to draw bodily boundaries that correspond with his male-gendered performance.

Although Ahmed begins to menstruate, he/she also develops a deep, masculine voice and grows a beard. Neither Ahmed nor the narrator mentions any surprise at this facial hair, but Ahmed does wonder about the origin of this voice—whether it is his/her own voice, or the voice of his/her father: "Je suis et ne suis pas cette voix qui s'accommode et prend le pli de mon corps, mon visage enroulé dans le voile de cette voix, est-elle de moi ou estce celle du père qui l'aurait insufflée...?" (45). Ahmed acknowledges the critical role of his/her father in the construction of his/her masculine gender, yet he/she also questions the role of his/her own agency in this construction. John D. Erickson finds in Ahmed's discomfort with his/her speaking voice a reflection of the postcolonial writer's troubled use of an imposed colonial language: "La voix, qui est la voix parlante du sujet, se détache de la personne qui parle de façon que les mots n'ont plus de source, d'origine, et que de ce 'lieu sans lieu' sorte une série d'oppositions dont le sujet (n')est (pas) composé" ("Femme voilée, récit voilé" 289). As an example, Erickson cites the statement by Ahmed already mentioned above: "Je suis l'architecte et la demeure; l'arbre et la sève; moi et un autre; moi et une autre" (46).

Ahmed's adolescent struggle revolves to a great extent, as does Silence's, around the deception inherent in his/her masculine performance: "La vérité s'exile; il suffit que je parle pour que la vérité s'éloigne, pour qu'on oublie et j'en deviens le fossoyeur et le déterreur, le maître et l'esclave" (45). The dramatic tension evident in this statement of the power of Ahmed's voice to create its own truth reveals the inner conflict that arises as he/she strains to situate his/her own identity in his/her body, even as his/her body exceeds his/her performance. Ahmed becomes simultaneously master and slave of his/her own materiality.

Once the trauma of Ahmed's first menses has passed, the narrator emphasizes Ahmed's determination and independence from his/her father in the continuation of this role: "Il [Ahmed] comprit que sa vie tenait a present au maintien de l'apparence. Il n'est plus une volonté du père. Il va devenir sa propre volonté" (48). When Ahmed decides, shortly thereafter, to marry his/her epileptic, deformed, cousin Fatima, Ahmed confronts his/her father with the artificiality of his/her gender, all the while upholding his/her intention and desire to continue his/her performance: "Ni toi ni moi ne sommes dupes," Ahmed says to his/her father. "Ma condition, non seulement je l'accepte et je la vis, mais je l'aime. Elle m'intéresse. Elle me permet d'avoir les privilèges que je n'aurais jamais pu connaître" (50). As for Silence, masculine privileges help to convince Ahmed to continue this role. However, Ahmed goes on to say that even as his/her male gender opens doors for him/her, it simultaneously imprisons him/her: "Elle m'ouvre des portes et j'aime cela, même si elle m'enferme ensuite dans une cage de vitres" (50). For both Silence and Ahmed, adolescence leads to a recommitment to their performances and to an assertion of their masculine identity, yet both continue to resist the ambiguities and dissonances of their blurred identities.

PASSING

Within the narrative of the *Roman de Silence*, Silence consistently performs as a boy in an authentic and convincing manner. He/she masters the appearance and behavior typical of a medieval boy of his/her standing. Butler notes that such appearance and behavior creates the illusion of a corresponding inner essence: "In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as cause" (*Gender Trouble* 136, emphasis original). The other characters in the romance accept this superficial identity; they believe him/her to be male—Silence passes.

Silence excels in his/her scholastic and athletic pursuits, outperforms the two minstrels who initiate him/her into that art, and, as a knight and warrior, is without peer. The narrator remarks that Silence's masculine performance and exterior appearance are nearly perfect even as a young child:

Il a us d'ome tant use
Et cel de feme refuse
Que poi en falt que li n'est malles:

Quaque on en voit est trestolt malles. (2475–8)

The irony in the narrator's comment lies, of course, in the fact that the "little" that Silence lacks in order to be a boy is a small but critical anatomical detail (Psaki, *Silence* xxiv).

Later, Silence's excellent jousting technique prompts the narrator not only to laud his/her performance but also to call attention to Nurture's domination over Nature:

Ainc feme nu fu mains lanriere
 De contoier en tel maniere.
 Kil veïst joster sans mantel
 Et l'escu porter en cantiel
 Et faire donques l'ademise,
 La lance sor le faltre mise,
 Dire peüst que Noretüre
 Puet moult ovrer contre Nature,
 Quant ele aprent si et escole
 A tel us feme et tendre et mole. (5147–56)

Carrying the shield on his/her left arm, lance poised on the lance-rest, Silence readies for the attack. The narrator notes that Silence is not at all reluctant to engage in combat, and stresses Nurture's great power over Nature to make of a *feme et tendre et mole* such a successful warrior. He proffers, furthermore, that were one of the defeated opponents to learn the truth of Silence's sex, the knight would feel "great shame" that a tender woman had beaten him:

Tels chevaliers...
 ...grant honte en peüst avoir
 Que feme tendre, fainte et malle,
 Ki rien n'a d'ome fors le halle,
 Et fors les dras et contenance,
 L'eüst abatu de sa lance. (5157/5160–4)

In spite of Silence's success as a knight and his/her masculine tanned complexion, dress, and appearance, for the narrator Silence remains a woman. In the immediately preceding lines the narrator has described Silence's aggressive (masculine) jousting technique that betrays no hint of femininity, yet Silence's convincing performance and exterior do not alter her female nature in the narrator's mind. Thus, were a defeated knight to learn the truth of "her" identity, the knight would be deeply ashamed to have been vanquished by a woman.

The narrator's reaffirmation of biological essentialism underscores Silence's extraordinary, indeed, wondrous achievements as a knight, given her biological sex. But although Silence's sex remains for the narrator unalterable, we can read in his "Ki rien n'a d'ome fors" the validation of the radical extent to which Silence has been regendered. Silence passes so thoroughly and so persuasively that the "little" that she lacks becomes all but meaningless in the context of the romance: the truth of his/her identity is that which passes for true. King Ebain himself, near the close of the romance and after having revealed Silence's female anatomy, also highlights Silence's successful performance as a male. Ebain praises Silence for having been the best and most valiant knight, saying:

Silence, moult as esté prols,
Bials chevaliers vallans et buens. (6579–80)⁴⁶

In spite of the traditional ending to the romance in which Silence assumes the female gender and marries the king, Silence's triumph as a male has opened a space for the possibility of heroic female achievement. Simon Gaunt affirms the empowering, feminist aspect of this message which he sees as contrasting with the poet's misogynistic subtext: "But if the patriarchal aphorism that 'sex is destiny' is ultimately endorsed, Silence's success as a knight serves to articulate precisely what the poet ostensibly seeks to repress, that is, that women may indeed have the ability to take on the cultural role of men, or...that Noretur may in fact have a good deal of power to subvert Nature" (203). Whereas I disagree with Gaunt's reading of Heldris's underlying misogynistic perspective, his declaration that Silence's achievements highlight women's potential to succeed in the male arena is nonetheless significant. Psaki underscores more emphatically the "radical premises" of the text, which she terms "protofeminist" (xxx).

However, at the same time that Silence's successes within the romance, as a biological female in a male role, affirm the seemingly unlimited potential of women to succeed in traditionally masculine pursuits, the reader does not view Silence simply as a successful female (or as a successful male). The narrator's repeated reminders, his juxtaposing of masculine and feminine pronouns, nouns and adjectives, and Silence's own comments, as well as the ongoing debate between Nature and Nurture, make the reader constantly aware of Silence's *dual* condition. The reader may, like the narrator, find Silence's success as a knight quite extraordinary given her biological sex, yet we see his/her complex, multiple identity as just that—complex and multiple. And although Silence may at times strain to self-identify as a male, or may suffer remorse for the deceptive aspect of this performance, the reader does not view him/her as either uniquely masculine or feminine. From this vantage point, the reader perceives the irony of Silence's situation and of the other characters' reactions to her performance. Moreover, it is only from this perspective that the reader can appreciate much of the humor and tension involved in the plot, as, for example, in the threat of homosexual relations when Queen Eupheme attempts to seduce Silence.

Like Silence, Ahmed, too, passes as a male. Exceeding even his/her father, Ahmed rules the household like a tyrant: "A la maison il se faisait servir par ses soeurs ses déjeuners et ses dîners.... A l'atelier il avait déjà commence a prendre les affaires en main. Efficace, moderne, cynique, il était un excellent négociateur. Son père était

dépassé.... Il n'avait pas d'amis. Secret et redoutable, il était craint. Il trônait dans sa chambre" (51). Ahmed writes in his/her journal that this harshness and severity provide a sense of strength, as well as protection: "Ma dureté, ma rigueur m'ouvrent des portes. Je n'en demande pas tant! J'aime le temps que j'encadre. En dehors je suis un peu perdu. Alors je deviens severe" (58). Indeed, Ahmed becomes so authoritarian and so perversely determined that his/her own mother refers to him/her as "un monstre" (52).

Following the death of his/her father, Ahmed assumes the official role of patriarch. He/she convokes his/her seven sisters to notify them of the change of command:

'A partir de ce jour, je ne suis plus votre frère; je ne suis pas votre père non plus, mais votre tuteur. J'ai le devoir et le droit de veiller sur vous. Vous me devez obéissance et respect. Enfin, inutile de vous rappeler que, si la femme chez nous est inférieure à l'homme, ce n'est pas parce que Dieu l'a voulu ou que le Prophète l'a décidé, mais parce qu'elle accepte ce sort. Alors subissez et vivez dans le silence!' (65–66)

Ahmed's harsh words to his/her sisters reveal much about the traditional, subordinate role of women in Islamic society, while also relegating his/her sisters to that position. In a sense, the "voice of patriarchy" is speaking here not only to but through Ahmed. Ahmed then contacts the notaries, calls for his/her uncles and oversees the transfer of the inheritance. "L'ordre régnait," the narrator states (66). This period of order, however, is brief. The instability that characterizes the entire world of this novel soon "reigns" again.

STAGING REPRESENTATION

In the *Roman de Silence*, Silence's adolescent resolve to maintain his/her gender performance leads him/her to join two traveling minstrels who visit his/her father's castle. The narrator describes one of these minstrels as the best "jongleur" in the world; the other is a harpist. Before arriving at the castle belonging to Silence's father, the two minstrels had traveled through England and acquired great wealth. Silence's heart advises him/her to follow them, reasoning that by learning the art of the minstrels, he/she will have a skill to fall back on if he/she does not succeed in chivalry.⁴⁷ Silence thinks to him/herself:

Avoec ces jogleörs iras.
 Por cho que biel les serviras,
 Et que tu painne i voelles rendre,
 Poras des estrumens aprendre.
 Se lens iés en chevalerie
 Si te valra la joglerie. (2859–64)

Silence not only anticipates the possibility of failing at chivalry, but foresees the necessity for a contingency plan if King Ebain were to die:

Et s'il avaient que li rois muire,
 Es cambres t'en poras deduire.
 Ta harpe et ta vièle avras
 En liu de cho que ne savras
 Orfrois ne fresials manoier.
 Si te porra mains anoier
 Se tu iés en un bastonage
 Ke tu aiés vials *el en grage*. (2865–72)⁴⁸

Presumably, if King Ebain dies, women will be able to receive their inheritances and thus Silence would assume the female gender (“Sil avenoit del roi Ebayn/Que morust hui u demain,/Feme raroit son iretage” [2831–3]). But Silence has already emphasized that he/she lacks training in women’s ways and activities (“Et tu iés ore si salvage/Ne sai a us de feme entendre” [2834–5]); he/she now reasons that choosing to serve as a minstrel would be less onerous than attempting to occupy the unfamiliar space of women.

Silence even adopts a new masculine name in this new role as jongleur: “Malduit,” or ill-taught, misguided. As Perret notes, this name adds yet another layer to the bodily and linguistic transformations of the text: “La jeune fille changera bientôt ce nom neutre de *Silence* au nom masculin de *Malduit*, masquage supplémentaire et alteration plus perverse du signe” (332). Gaunt, on the other hand, sees in Silence’s choice of name an acknowledgement of her true gender: “Silence recognizes her femininity by assuming the name Malduit ‘badly instructed’ when she runs away to become a *jongleur* (3175–9)” (208). Stock, who translates ‘Malduit’ instead as “badly brought up” (23), states that this new name reveals Silence’s inner turmoil, “her misgivings about being a sexual hybrid” (24). Stock points out moreover that Silence’s success as a troubadour creates a professional and figurative break with his/her past name: “Her stint as a minstrel allows her to subvert the suppression of speech necessary to her impersonation and symbolized in her old name” (24).

Silence’s rationale for choosing to serve as a minstrel is thus in keeping with previous decisions made by Silence or on his/her behalf. Silence chooses to follow the minstrels for the advantage that the knowledge of their art would bring, not for personal expression or artistic outlet. Examined in this light, Bloch’s statement that Silence is “inexplicably attracted to poetry, more specifically, to a troupe of itinerant jongleurs with whom she escapes” (82) seems contrived. As throughout the romance, reason operates forcefully to influence Silence’s behavior and choices.

The association of domestic space with women’s space resides in the forefront of Nature’s earlier description of proper femininity. When trying to convince Silence to assume her natural female gender, Nature commands Silence to remain indoors, sewing:

Va en la cambre a la costure,
 Cho violt de nature li us. (2528–9)

Clearly, in contrast to the limited space and activity of the medieval lady, the minstrel would occupy a very privileged position—a position with tremendous freedom of movement that would have been virtually unknown for a lady in feudal society. The medieval jongleur traveled freely from castles to public squares to outdoor festivals and gatherings. He diffused literary works as he enjoyed great public popularity, and occasionally great wealth. Drawing parallels between Silence's role as a jongleur and similar roles played by other medieval protagonists, Labbie emphasizes the freedom brought by this disguise, locating it outside both the private and public spaces:

Disguised as a jongleur, her face stained with nettle juice, Silence dons an additional mask and enters an intermediate realm between the private, domestic 'feminine' space and the public, wordly 'masculine' space, while disavowing her noble status. Here she is able to express her complex self, unrestricted by the cultural regulations of the public and private realms. Like her textual peers Tristan and Nicolette, Silence finds liberation in the open role of the traveling, apparently rootless jongleur. (70)

However, the minstrel's position of power and relative wealth was by no means free of risks or dangers. In the *Roman de Silence*, Silence's fellow jongleurs and original teachers become so jealous of his/her success in their art that they begin to plot secretly against him/her. In general, itinerant artists often struggled to secure regular employment and frequently lived a marginal and difficult existence, as Xavier Darcos, Jean-Pierre Robert and Bernard Tartyre explain in *Le Moyen Age et le XVI^e siècle en littérature*:

On sait la vie aventureuse et précaire que menaient les artistes itinérants. Rares étaient ceux qui parvenaient à trouver une sécurité matérielle durable en s'attachant au service de riches aristocrates dont ils devenaient les 'ménestrels'. Pour la plupart, ils étaient livrés aux caprices d'un public toujours changeant et aux incertitudes de leur incessant vagabondage de village au château. Entre deux spectacles, on les retrouvait aussi dans les tavernes les moins recommandables où ils s'étaient forgé une solide réputation de joueurs, buveurs et tricheurs. (141)

Silence's initially seemingly easy solution to his/her problematic gender identity appears less simple and straightforward in light of this dangerous and unsavory atmosphere. Instead of exchanging a risky gender performance for a proper profession, Silence's decision to join the *jongleurs* exchanges one kind of marginal existence for another. Furthermore, the artificial or deceitful aspect of Silence's gender performance finds its own parallel in the explicit staging of alternative realities that lies at the heart of minstrelsy, storytelling and theatrical performance.

The term *jonglerie* originates from the Latin *ioculari* which is defined in medieval French as "'playing tricks,' 'joking,' or 'singing songs'" (Cooper 349). Cooper also notes that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, *jonglerie* frequently occurred interchangeably with *jenglois*, which derives from the Latin *iactare* and means "idle or empty speech" (349). "In either case," Cooper states, "playing tricks, joking and empty speech all have

one thing in common—the use of signs or symbols to point to that which is not there, to indicate absence” (349). For Cooper, Silence as jongleur embodies the poetic ideal: “that perfect emptiness which poetic language approaches (the unseen female body, the unheard female voice). . . . In *jonglerie*, Silence represents the maximum: self-contained, self-generated, she is harmony and consonance, the perfect union of desire and the expression of desire—all that is impossible to be said” (350). Thus, whereas Cooper introduces the term *jonglerie* with references to its association with trick-playing, joking and frivolous speech, she ultimately abandons such images in favor of a more idealized reading of Silence’s role as a jongleur as a representation of poetic harmony and union.

Similarly, Bloch also emphasizes the commonalities between minstrelsy and poetry, between the troubadour and the poet. For Bloch, the troubadour or *trouvère*, like the lover, and like the poet himself, expresses the tension between the seduction of the unnamed or unspoken and the desire for proper naming. Referring to Cador’s courtship of Euphémie, Bloch states: “It is silence or that which is not said that nourishes passion. . . . The chiasmically impossible effects of speech withheld make the lover analogous to the poet.

The desire of the lover is a desire to speak, to avow, just as the desire of the poet is to break silence—and to speak of Silence” (89–90). Likewise, the troubadour desires to speak, “to fill the silences or ‘trous’ in speech” although Bloch stresses that rather than being motivated by sexual desire, the troubadour’s interests are largely financial: “If the *trouvère* is the one whose invention fills holes, it is the holes in his own pocket that he would like to fill. ‘Trouver’—‘to find,’ ‘to invent’—also means ‘to earn.’ There is literally no profit in silence. . . .” (90–1). Bloch concludes by stating that poetry and money both also represent the possibility of an independent or autonomous invention, “the possibility of self-creating, purely specular and speculative value whose very lack of origin signals the impossibility of reproduction or genealogical succession” (92). Silence too, of course, creates or engenders him/herself in a literal manner within the romance, as Bloch notes: “Like the counterfeiter, she engenders herself, becomes, in the final account of her adventures, the author of her own tale” (93). This unattached, unnatural and unreproducible act of self-creation constitutes, then, for Bloch, the essence of the analogy between money, poetic invention and Silence’s own engendering.

Surely, however, Silence’s role as a jongleur further underscores the performative aspect of his/her transvestism as it incorporates the themes of essence and construction, reality and fantasy. Labbie highlights this parallel: “In a textual move that further foregrounds the performative nature of gender categories Heldris narrates Silence’s decision to become a jongleur—literally to make the self into a performing object. . . .” (70).⁴⁹ As the cross-dresser enacts his/her gender, he/she constructs his/her identity. Similarly, as the minstrel or performing artist stages his or her own visions, he or she creates new realities through this very performance.

The intersection between the concepts of performativity and performance, or theatrical practices, has a long and rich philosophical history.⁵⁰ Since the publication in 1962 of the collected seminars on performativity by the British philosopher J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, the implications of these intersecting terms has been of considerable interest to critical thinkers.⁵¹ Although Austin limited his own work to nontheatrical performativity, separating ordinary speech-act performances from the actor’s citational practices, Derrida has emphasized the “general citationality” common to both:

“Both...[are] structured by a generalized iterability, a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike” (Parker and Sedgwick 4).⁵² The degree of agency of the speaker may vary considerably, as may the space of reception or gaze on the receiving end of the act, depending on whether the speaker is an actor on stage or an “ordinary” person making an ordinary speech-act, yet the performativity of the act does not necessarily vary. In both instances, performative utterances or acts do something as they are spoken or enacted. Furthermore, this performativity raises larger epistemological questions.

Butler notes that the performative aspect of gender identity challenges the idea of a prediscursive, interior essence or “reality.” Speaking of the acts and behaviors that constitute a given gender identity, Butler states:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (136, emphasis original)

This lack of ontological status in turn poses questions regarding whether there is an essential truth or identity. For Butler, the answer is a resounding negative. The performativity of gender roles creates the illusion of an interior essence, yet this illusion is “an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse,...an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (*Gender Trouble* 136). Butler sees in this illusion of an interior essence an effective mechanism by which the “political regulations and disciplinary practices” that govern and produce obligatory heterosexuality are displaced from view (136).

Within the narrative of the *Roman de Silence*, the explicit performativity of Silence’s gender role enables the reader to see through these traditionally displaced regulatory practices and view the self-conscious construction of gender within this culture. The transparency of this construction elucidates the illusory quality of the myth of interiority, and forces the reader to question the underlying assumptions regarding essence and an inner self or core. Silence’s performance as a jongleur further foregrounds the themes of performativity and autoconstruction, and presents the possibility of a multiplicity of identities through a multiplicity of narratives. At the same time, the persis-tent anxiety that runs through the romance in Silence’s own reactions to his/her indeterminacy and in Nature and Nurture’s ongoing debate reveals that such openendedness and instability threaten the stability of the dominant culture.

In *L’Enfant de sable*, Ahmed too becomes a performer, but his/her introduction into this new role occurs in a substantially less intentional manner than does Silence’s. One hot evening, while sitting alone on the terrace of the only café in an unnamed city, a mysterious old woman, Oum Abbas, approaches Ahmed: “Elle me dit: ‘Un des compagnons du Prophète m’a mis sur tes pas. Cela fait longtemps que je suis a ta recherche. Ne dis rien. Laissemoi deviner ta parole’” (117). She interrogates Ahmed as to his/her true identity and then leads him/her to the *cirque forain* located beyond the city limits. The old woman invites Ahmed to perform in this traveling circus troupe which she

and her son own and operate. At this point, Ahmed begins to perform as a drag queen in the circus, replacing the star actor in the troupe who must retire because his wife is jealous of the amount of time that he has been putting into his shows. Thus Ahmed, who takes the stage name of Zahra Amirat Lhob, “princesse d’amour,” retains his/her public male gender but now begins to perform as a man impersonating a woman.

Abbas, the son of Oum Abbas and the proprietor and director of the circus, perceives Ahmed as a biological female. He creates a new act that he envisions as particularly successful and titillating, as he explains to Ahmed:

Tu te déguises en homme a la première partie du spectacle, tu disparaîtras cinq minutes pour réapparaître en femme fatale... Il y a de quoi rendre fou tous les hommes de l’assistance. Ça va être excitant..., je vois ça d’ici..., un vrai spectacle avec une mise en scène, du suspens et même un peu de nu, pas beaucoup, mais une jambe, une cuisse..., c’est dommage, tu n’as pas de gros seins. (121, ellipses original)

In contrast with the cross-dressed performance that Ahmed has lived throughout his/her childhood and young adulthood in which passing was the ultimate goal, the circus act exploits the tension between the real and the costume or appearance without ever attempting to persuade or deceive the audience. Watching the retiring drag queen, Malika, perform his show, Ahmed notes, “Tout baigne dans la dérision, sans réelle ambiguïté” (120). Ahmed is also struck by the audience’s good-natured willingness to participate in the ruse: “Une complicité unissait tout ce monde dans la bonne humeur et le rire” (120). Abbas, too, comments on the open deception of all of the circus performances and on the public’s eagerness to play along: “Tout est faux, et c’est ça notre truc, on ne le cache pas; les gens viennent pour ça...; seul l’âne qui fume et fait le mort est vrai...” (120). For the circus audience, as for the audience listening to the story of Ahmed’s life within *L’Enfant de sable* and the reader reading the novel, this ironic perspective creates much of the appeal of the performance.

Ahmed says that he/she assumed the role of Lalla Zahra without apprehension, but rather with jubilant happiness, in the hope that he/she would be able to learn more about him/herself, to answer the question that has plagued him/her since adolescence, ‘Qui suis-je?’: “Je jouais et suivais les ordres; ma curiosité me poussait à aller encore plus loin. Je ne saurais peut-être rien de cette ‘famille d’artistes’ mais j’espérais beaucoup en savoir plus sur moi-même” (123). Whereas Silence chooses to perform with the minstrels as a sort of hedge or insurance against possible future occurrences, Ahmed’s first reaction is more personal, more subjective—he/she welcomes the adventure with inquisitiveness, eager to embark on a new journey of self-discovery, to break with the past, and to search for a more authentic identity.

Nevertheless, the narrator notes that Ahmed’s break with the past does not transpire without difficulties and that this requires some spontaneous improvisation on his/her part: “La rupture avec le passé n’était pas facile. Alors elle inventait ces espaces blancs où d’une main elle lançait des images folles et de l’autre les habillait du goût de la vie, celle dont elle rêvait” (127). As Ahmed creates a new “reality” from these dream images, the theme of auto-construction becomes ever more explicit. The role of performing artist and the possibility that this offers in terms of self-creation and exploration parallels Ahmed’s

search for a new identity. Jean Déjeux, who emphasizes the violence of the original “injury” to Ahmed’s identity in *his* father’s choice of gender, sees in the drag queen circus role a further continuation of the themes of simulation and illusion: “Ahmed joue les simulacres et les illusions.... La violence des origines va être pour Ahmed une violence permanente dans ce jeu sans fin de dissimuler et de subir” (“Les Romans de Tahar Ben Jelloun” 279). Again, the performative and the theatrical performance combine to interrogate the notions of essence and truth, imitation and falsehood.

During this period, Ahmed seems to enjoy an almost blissful moment of self-creation and exploration in reverie and solitary writing. The narrator comments again on his/her happiness during this period, while stressing that although Ahmed is able to distance his/her difficult past, it continues to come back to haunt him/her:

Docile et soumise, Lalla Zahra purgeait ainsi une longue saison pour l’oubli. Elle ne contrariait jamais la vieille et gardait précieusement pour la nuit ses pensées. Elle écrivait en cachette, pendant le sommeil des autres, notait tout sur ses cahiers d’écolier. Elle parvenait à éloigner son passé mais non à l’effacer. Quelques images fortes se maintenaient vives et cruelles dans son esprit: le père autoritaire; la mère folle; l’épouse épileptique. (128)

Removed from dominant society, in the protected, isolated environment of the circus, Ahmed is free to verbalize privately his/her own thoughts and feelings for the first time.

The nightmare visions that repeatedly disrupt Ahmed’s harmonious existence, however, underscore the extent to which this happy, indeterminate state contradicts the strict rigidity of the Law of the Father. Ahmed has an ongoing sensation that the fierce and cruel voice of his/her dead father pursues him/her, expounding on the worthlessness of females within Arabic tradition: “Avant l’Islam,” says this disembodied voice to Ahmed, “les pères arabes jetaient une naissance femelle dans un trou et la recouvraient de terre jusqu’à la mort. Ils avaient raison. Ils se débarrassaient ainsi du malheur” (129). This voice goes on, rationalizing his own inability to bury similarly his wife’s daughters and telling Ahmed that *he* had been the father’s one hope. The father’s voice berates and torments Ahmed for having chosen to give expression to the female gender, and threatens him with death for this betrayal:

J’ai toujours été fasciné par le courage de ces pères; un courage que je n’ai jamais eu. Toutes les filles que ta mère a déposées méritaient ce sort. Je ne les ai pas enterrées parce qu’elles n’existaient pas pour moi. Toi, ce fut différent. Toi, ce fut un défi. Mais tu as trahi. Je te poursuivrai jusqu’à la mort... Ahmed, mon fils, l’homme que j’ai formé, est mort, et toi tu n’es qu’une usurpatrice. Tu voles la vie de cet homme; tu mourras de ce vol. (129–30)

The violence of the father’s binary thinking is startling not only in its blindness to the worth and power of women, but in its inability to conceive of Ahmed as embodying both genders. Ahmed’s life as a male represented a personal victory for the father; as a female, Ahmed does not deserve to live. In contrast to the verbal aggression of the father,

Ahmed's vision of his mother remains ever-silent and unhearing. In death as in life, she has removed herself from her husband's cruelty by enclosing herself in a protective space of deafness and mutism. Her powerlessness is as striking as is her husband's violence.

Even within the scenes in which Ahmed happily investigates his/her inner self, his/her search for a more authentic identity runs into conflict with the narrator's emphasis on the illusory quality of Ahmed's theatrical performance. Here, the narrator underscores the transitory aspect not only of Ahmed's performance, but of all storytelling and history:

Amis! Le temps est ce rideau qui tout à l'heure tombera sur le spectacle et enveloppera notre personnage sous un linceul.

Compagnons! La scène est en papier! L'histoire que je vous conte est un vieux papier d'emballage. Il suffirait d'une allumette, une torche, pour tout renvoyer au néant, à la veille de notre première rencontre. Le même feu brûlerait les portes et les jours. (126)

The curtain that will fall on Ahmed's performance is not only the stage curtain but the curtain of time, the curtain that represents the ephemeral and unstable characteristics of all that is written or told. The narrator here maintains that Ahmed alone will be spared the destruction of this fire, and alone will survive to continue his story. Yet, Ahmed's survival seems to lie not in his/her own storytelling, but in his/her silence: "Seul notre personnage serait sauf! Lui seul saurait trouver dans le tas de cendres un abri, un refuge et la suite de notre histoire. Il parle dans son livre d'une île. C'est peut-être sa nouvelle demeure, l'arrière-pays, l'arrière-histoire, l'étendue ultérieure, l'infinie blancheur du silence" (126). As in the *Roman de Silence*, we find a persistent tension between the drive to narrate, to tell a story, and the transient and illusory nature of life that resists the limitations and restrictions of any single perspective or narrative.

CHAPTER 3

Parallel Ambiguities

Narrative and Generic

Both the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* further accentuate the indeterminacy of Silence's and of Ahmed's gender and materiality by exploiting linguistic and narrative ambiguities that parallel their physical and generic instability. Through the juxtaposition of contradictory nouns and pronouns, the use of wordplay, unreliable narrators and "gaps" in the narrative, these two texts reinforce the ambiguous nature of Silence and of Ahmed and, by extension, pose broader questions concerning the (im)possibility of fixed identity. Furthermore, the narrative self-reflexivity of the texts, which makes obvious the "seams" in these works, that is, the construction of the texts themselves, again highlights the theme of auto-construction that runs through both the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* as Silence and Ahmed create their own gender performances. Finally, the privileged perspective of the reader or audience, which enables us to see both their female physicality and their masculine gender, reminds us repeatedly of Silence's and Ahmed's dual nature so that neither hero(ine) ever appears uniquely one gender or the other, but rather a complex combination of both.

THE READER'S DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE

The reader's double perspective must lie at the heart of a reading of Silence and Ahmed as hybrid beings. Although the narrators make clear Silence's and Ahmed's female sex at birth, their masculine performances are so convincing that the reader might almost forget about this sex, were it not for the ongoing debates between Nature and Nurture, the inner turmoil of the two adolescent hero(ine)s and the narrators' periodic comments and "asides." These reflections and disputes repeatedly refocus the reader's awareness on Silence's and Ahmed's indefinite, blended identities, and also occasion the humor in both of these works. While the characters and narrators within these two works argue at times over whether Silence and Ahmed are "really" female or male, I contend that the reader's privileged vantage point renders this discussion irrelevant: Silence and Ahmed exist textually as simultaneously female and male. To claim that they are "really" either one or the other is meaningless.

In the *Roman de Silence*, several passages stand out as highlighting in a particularly notable manner the reader's advantaged perspective and thus her perception of Silence's

compound identity. As I noted in the previous chapter, the first debate between Nature and Nurture (2500–2656) draws the lines of the argument between the essentialist and social constructivist points of view. Nature emphasizes Silence’s female essence, especially the great beauty that Nature took such care to give “her,” and outlines the problems that Silence will have in the future when other women desire the beauty that they see in this male figure:

.m. femes a en ceste vie
 Ki de toi ont moult grant envie
 Por la bialtet qu’eles i voient,
 Car puet scel estre eles i croient
 Tel cose qu’en toi nen a mie.
 Et tels est ore moult t’amie/
 Qui te haroit de tolt le cuer,
 Se il de toi savoit le fuer,
 Qu’el s’en tenroit a malballie
 Que s’esperance estroit fallie. (2513–22)¹

Nature then entreats Silence to give up “her” unnatural boyish behavior, to stop traveling the woods, hunting and shooting, and to stay indoors sewing “for Nature’s custom demands this” (“Cho violt de nature li us” [2529]).

Nurture, on the other hand, insists that she has already completely denatured Silence, and that environment has more power than nature in determining human behavior:

Se jo ne fac par noretüre
 .m. gens ovrer contre nature. (2599–2600)

Nurture’s comments may at this moment in the narrative seem more accurate than Nature’s, since Silence is clearly functioning competently and convincingly as a male, while Nature’s concerns over an eventual romantic conflict seem misplaced. Yet the reader’s double perspective makes Nurture’s comments also appear unfounded. Since we have had no indication of a miraculous transformation, there would be little reason (or need) to think that Silence’s performance had truly effaced “her” nature, “her” female sex. Nature’s vexation and apprehension appear as an attempt to assert her (futile) power over Nurture; Nurture’s remarks appear as only so much braggadocio. The reader sees that Silence exists as both male and female without much difficulty other than the need for secrecy required by the society in which he/she lives.

Most of the humor of the *Roman de Silence* also hinges on the reader’s double perspective. As I have already mentioned, it is only from this vantage point that the reader can appreciate the comical element in lines such as the narrator’s description of Silence as *very nearly* a boy:

Il a us d'ome tant use
 Et cel de feme refuse
 Que poi en falt que il n'est malles:
 Quanque on en voit est trestolt malles. (2475–78)

The irony of numerous other statements, as, for example, the French army's declaration following Silence's heroic battle against the four disloyal counts, that "Such a *man* commands love" ("Tels hom, font il, fait a amer" [5553]) also relies on the reader's inside knowledge. Of course, the irony also of Silence's self-identification as a boy carries its weight only from this privileged point of view, for example in his/her proclamation of strict masculinity: "Car vallés sui et nient mescine" (2650).

Moreover, the amusing or homoerotic aspect of Queen Eufeme's attempted seduction of Silence (3694–4186; 5657–5766) would be lost if the reader saw only Silence's convincing male behavior and appearance. However, since the reader does know that even while Silence performs successfully as a male, he/she is also biologically female, the queen's misinterpretation of Silence's sex, and Silence's predicament as he/she tries to negotiate this delicate situation without revealing this sex, become especially entertaining. When the narrator first describes Queen Eufeme's passionate attraction to Silence, the reader groans inwardly, sensing the difficult and comical situation about to unfold:

Car onques Tristrans por Izelt,
 Ne dame Izeuls por dant Tristan
 N'ot tele angoisse ne ahan
 Com eult Eufeme la roïne
 Por le vallet ki ert meschine;
 N'onques Jozeph, ki fu prisons
 Rois Pharaöns, si le lisons,
 N'ot tele angoisse ne tel mal
 Par la mollier al senescal
 Comme ut icis par la roïne. (3700–3709)

The narrator's literary allusions to Tristan and Iseult highlight Eufeme's anguished passion for Silence as it elevates Eufeme through comparison to Iseult, while the allusions to King Pharaoh and Joseph and the repetition of Eufeme's royal title underscore the inequality of their social status. Additionally, the narrator's phrase "le vallet ki ert meschine," which he repeats throughout the seduction scenes, again emphasizes Silence's hybrid identity and the relationship of this dual nature to the queen's unrequitable love. Although Eufeme desires the beautiful *vallet*, her inability to perceive Silence's biological femaleness will render any potential relationship between the two impossible.

As the queen proceeds in her attempts to seduce Silence, the homoerotic facet of these scenes depends again on the reader's double perspective. For example, in the following passage in which Queen Eufeme attempts to persuade Silence to return her passionate kisses, the reader's knowledge that Silence is biologically female creates the tension and homoerotic component of the scene:

Donc, me baisiés, dist la roïne,
 Joste la face, sos ma guinple.'
 Li dona cil .i. baisier simple,
 Car il n'entent pas, al voir dire,
 Con fait baisier ele desire.
 Et la dame, qui nen a cure
 D'estre baisie en tel mesure,
 Li done .v. baisiers traitis,
 Bien amorols et bien faitis,
 Et ot les .ii. baisiers promis.
 Li a des altres tant tramis
 Que il en est tols anuiés. (3764–3775)

Similarly, it is from this privileged perspective that the reader can appreciate the humor in such lines as the narrator's description of the queen's frustration at Silence's *impotence* when he/she refuses her sexual advances ("La nonposance de celui/Fait a la dame grant anui" [3875].). Silence's youthful innocence and naïveté, coupled with his/her loyalty to King Ebain, and "her" presumably heterosexual orientation, combine to create a situation rife with confusion, awkwardness, misunderstandings and potential danger. This sticky situation would, of course, lose all of its force were it not for the reader's awareness of Silence's hybridism.

In *L'Enfant de sable* a number of episodes also stand out as underscoring the reader's awareness of Ahmed's double status. During Ahmed's childhood, his/her parents' insistence on male gender identification alerts the reader to the extreme importance within this society of maintaining very clearly defined gender roles. As a young child, at the *bains maures* with his/her mother, Ahmed requests to use some of the henna that his/her mother and sisters apply to their own hair. The mother's fierce interdiction, "C'est reserve aux filles!" (33), leaves little room for gender blurring or experimentation. Similarly, when the young Ahmed runs home crying one day after having been attacked by three hoodlums who steal his/her bread, his/her father's stern reprimand reasserts this strict gender division: "Mon père me donna une gifle dont je me souviens encore et me dit: 'Tu n'es pas une fille pour pleurer! Un homme ne pleure pas!'" (39). Not surprisingly, Ahmed also self-identifies as a male, in spite of "her" female physicality: "Il avait raison, les larmes c'est très féminin! Je séchai les miennes et sortis a la recherche des voyous pour me battre" (39). The reader, on the other hand, sees Ahmed as both female and male, even while he/she strives to fulfill the macho norms of his/her culture.

Following Ahmed's adolescent *crise de conscience*, he/she reaffirms even more emphatically his/her decision to continue living as a man. The contrast, however, between "his" determination and the reader's awareness renders this stage in his/her life both disturbing and engaging. Ahmed's announcement to his/her father that he/she intends to grow a mustache ("Père, je vais me laisser pousser la moustache" [50]) may puzzle the reader a little, but Ahmed's declaration that he/she intends to marry ("Père, je voudrais me marier" [50]) creates for the reader a kind of uneasy anticipation similar to that caused by the narrator's foreshadowing in the *Roman de Silence* of Queen Eufeme's infatuation with Silence. In the case of Ahmed, however, he/she is not the naïve and innocent prey of an aggressive huntress that Silence is. Ahmed enters this awkward and delicate situation with his/her eyes wide open. His/her pronouncements are defiant challenges to his/her father to carry this performance to its most extreme limits. Ahmed even states so much *himself*: "Je voudrais aller jusqu'au bout de cette histoire. Je suis homme. Je m'appelle Ahmed selon la tradition de notre Prophète. Et je demande une épouse.... Père, tu m'as fait homme, je dois le rester" (51).

Ahmed imagines declaring "his" intentions to "his" future wife, Fatima, whose multiple physical disabilities make it difficult for her to walk: "Elle viendra, traînant une jambe, le visage crispé, le regard inquiet, bouleversée par ma demande" (58). This grotesque image contrasts markedly with the seduction scenes between Queen Eufeme and Silence in the *Roman de Silence*. Certainly there is little sexual desire or (homo)erotic content here, although perhaps a bit of morbid fascination as the reader attempts to imagine their union. When the narrator interjects, following Ahmed's description, that he sees signs of discomfort on the faces of the members of his audience—"Amis, je vous avais dit que cette porte était étroite. Je lis sur vos visages l'embarras et l'inquiétude" (58)—the reader can empathize.

Although the tone of *L'Enfant de sable* is significantly darker and more psychologically complex than that of the *Roman de Silence*, moments of humor do arise. One comical image that occurs early in the novel is the scene already mentioned when Hadj Ahmed has his finger discreetly "circumcised" in place of Ahmed's (imaginary) penis (32). Much later in Ahmed's life, when he/she considers adopting a child, the reader's awareness of his/her hybridism makes his/her ruminations surprising and humorous: 'J'ai eu l'idée ce matin d'adopter un enfant. Une idée brève qui est tombée avec la même rapidité qu'elle est arrivée. Un enfant? Je pourrais en faire un, avec n'importe qui, le laitier, le muezzin, le laveur de morts..., n'importe qui pourvu qu'il soit aveugle" (105). The clash between Ahmed's acknowledgement of "her" female physicality ("je pourrais en faire un") and his/her simple, matter-of-fact solution to "his" male gender ("pourvu qu'il soit aveugle") again highlights the conflict inherent in this hybrid existence. Whereas the reader's perspective allows her to see Silence and Ahmed as both male and female, in neither text does the hero(ine) experience this duality in a trouble-free manner. While suggesting that male and female need not be opposing terms, these narratives also depict clearly the great resistance to such gender blurring within these two cultures.

LINGUISTIC AND NARRATIVE AMBIGUITIES IN THE *ROMAN DE SILENCE*

A number of scholars have commented on the linguistic and narrative ambiguities of the *Roman de Silence*, often in terms of the “modernity” of the work. Cooper, Perret, Bloch, Allen, Psaki, Gallagher, Ringer, Labbie, and Gilmore have each made particular note of these ambiguities. Cooper especially underscores the discursive obscurity of the *Roman de Silence*, its “intrigues of language,” which draw in the reader to participate in the romance (341) and which parallel the thematics of Silence’s uncertain gender: “It is precisely that sexual indeterminacy which inflames the language of this fiction and which renders it so profoundly modern in the etymological sense of the word” (342). Cooper begins her essay by citing and then translating a passage from the romance, noting that her translation of this passage is “open-ended” of necessity, in keeping with the “miraculous and enigmatic text” of the romance itself (341).²

Certainly, however, not all scholars agree on this point. While acknowledging the prevalence of linguistic play and ambiguity in the *Roman de Silence*, Simon Gaunt argues that it works to condemn indeterminacy rather than to privilege it: “There is a good deal of linguistic play, but I would suggest that this serves less to valorize ambivalence than to censure it and thereby reinforce the predetermination of the conflict between nature and nurture” (206). Gaunt, whose central thesis revolves around the idea that after having explored and rejected the social constructivist view of gender, the *Roman de Silence* “firmly reinstat[es] the status quo” at the end of the romance (203), also maintains that any uncertainty that does exist within the work is merely situational and superficial: “The ambivalence to which Heldris draws attention does not involve indeterminacy as such, but a choice between two clearly contrasting meanings which are not compatible” (206). But while Gaunt attempts to argue against the existence of ambivalence within the romance, he does not offer a solid explanation for the manner in which the indeterminacies of language and narrative mirror the thematics of Silence’s indeterminate gender.

Referring to the suffixes *-us* and *-a* which distinguish the masculine and feminine forms of Silence’s name in Latin, Gaunt identifies an opposition of genders rather than generic blurring.³ He attributes Heldris’s development of linguistic indeterminacy to a subconscious error that conflicts with his stated aim:

This [linguistic] play does not, however, highlight indeterminacy: it creates a rigid opposition between masculine and feminine, and therefore between two opposed and mutually exclusive meanings, suggesting that misnaming is a serious crime against nature, [and] consequently against truth. If Heldris explores the indeterminacy of poetic language here, he appears to do so unwittingly, for his declared aim is to criticize its misuse. (206–7)

Taking the narrator at his word when he declares himself critical of indeterminacy and equating the narrator’s misogynistic statements with Heldris’s own opinions, Gaunt again

sees in the existence of linguistic indeterminacy an inadvertent and personal revelation on the part of Heldris: "He censures ambivalence, but paradoxically as he does so he affirms its existence by offering a demonstration of how it functions, and this parallels his impulse to talk about the idea of gender as a construct as he suppresses it" (207). Gaunt's literal interpretation of the narrator's purpose, coupled with his compression of the narrator and author, combine to create for Gaunt a distinctly oppositional and misogynistic text.⁴ In this "either/or" scenario, Gaunt must attribute any demonstration within the narrative of the functioning of ambivalence to "paradox."

Gaunt criticizes the essays by Bloch, Cooper and Allen for the positive role that they give to linguistic play because, he states, such a reading eradicates the text's transformational power: "They read sexual difference as a metaphor for linguistic difference, thereby divesting the narrative of referential import and of any implications it might have for sexual politics" (214). Gaunt apparently rules out the potential political power of figurative language. He closes his own essay with a feminist message, praising the strength of the voices within the text that oppose the suppression and silencing of women. Here too, however, Gaunt finds evidence for an accidental psychological slippage on the part of Heldris: "Heldris's text expresses fear of women disguised as misogyny, and...ironically, this misogyny draws attention to the very anxiety he wishes to conceal" (203). Several of the scholars who explore the linguistic and thematic ambiguities of the *Roman de Silence* in a positive light do, however, agree with Gaunt's reading of Heldris's unwitting or subconscious revelation of anxiety and misogyny.⁵ Of course, it would be difficult to know precisely what the author has revealed "on purpose" or inadvertently. And in either case, the effect of linguistic and narrative indeterminacies is to augment and intensify the multiple ambiguities at play throughout the work.

SILENCE'S NAME: MASKING SEXUALITY, FOREGROUNDING CONTRADICTION

Thematic and linguistic parallels related to Silence's name have been the subject of considerable critical interest.⁶ The relationship between Cador's choice of name for his son/daughter and the fact that Silence must remain *silent* regarding "her" true nature, "her" biological sex, strikes the reader immediately. But while Silence does not reveal "her" sex until the final unveiling scene in front of King Ebain and his court, he/she does, of course, communicate verbally within the romance. His/her name thus forces the reader to bear constantly in mind the original injunction and premise for his/her gendered performance.

Perret identifies in Silence's name a tension between spoken or exterior language and interior language: "A l'inverse, l'absence de langage est personnifiée par Silence, qui n'est qu'introversiion, toute en monologue, ou plutôt toute repliée sur un dialogue intérieur entre Nature (la féminité) et Noretur (la virilité)" (337). For Perret, then, the debate between the allegorical characters of Nature and Nurture that runs throughout the romance would take place within Silence him/herself. This noisy and argumentative verbal show would stand in sharp contrast to the quietude indicated in his/her name. Jewers also notes a conflict in Silence's name, between the absence of speech required of

his/her gendered performance and implied in his/her name, and the fact that he/she does speak and speak well:

The chosen signifier may indicate a suitable sense of heroic self-effacement and an absence of textual identity, but the signified, Silence herself, is far from tacit, even though she dutifully maintains an uneasy silence about her gender. Indeed, her chosen career as a minstrel is incompatible with the notion of silence, and time and again in the narrative she uses verbal dexterity to save her life. (94)

Referring to the Latin gendered endings of Silence's name, Jewers adds succinctly that these serve as a constant reminder of his/her ambiguous status: "Masculine or feminine, the indeterminacy of Silence's name reminds the reader of the continual contradiction that governs her life" (94).⁷

Gilmore, who calls Silence by the masculine Latin form "Silentius" in order to maintain a clear distinction between the character and the trope "silence," which she notes is "at least as active linguistically as the character" (120 n. 8), argues persuasively for the communicative power of Silence's silence:

Silentius speaks throughout the text, but her most significant communications come through silence as a rhetorical device. She is consistently silent about her gender, even when faced with the Queen's attempts at seduction, but most importantly, she remains silent to Merlin while he explains how only a woman can catch him. Silence, as a trope, functions as a non-articulation that nevertheless delivers a meaning, a signified without a signifier: 'Silences, trop avés parole' [Silence, you talk too much] (6274). In each instance of communication through silence, silence conveys meaning by the absence of speech, by the absence of signifiers. (114)

Like Allen, who states that silence functions rhetorically as a "placeholder" (105), Gilmore asserts that silence in the *Roman de Silence* communicates meaning through metonymy: "It is only the context that signifies: the context of dress, setting, behavior, the application of *us* [custom] and the *-us* applied as a masculine marker at the end of her name. The signified is known only by metonymy, by what surrounds the absence of signifiers" (114).

Focusing on the contradictions implicit in writing a poem about a hidden or silent female form, Cooper addresses the interplay between the trope of silence and the process of poetic production. She praises the vivid manner in which the poet considers the "sexuation of language" as he questions the potentiality of "pure signification" (343) and she draws attention to the relationship between the words "silence" and "science," which appear in the text as a rhymed couplet ("Ne de bonté, ne de science./Itant vos dirai de Silence" [2395–6]).⁸ Cooper finds in this association not only a rejection of the attainability of verbal mastery, but also a depiction of the power of the silent or absent female in poetic creation:

For her name simultaneously incorporates the impossibility of a totalizing linguistic form (to speak of silence is to betray the very principle), and a graphic reinstatement of the most basic question of the romance: 'I' (*elle*), the ineffable and unattainable feminine body, is placed within *scientia* in such a way as to suggest the enduring force of and quest for the absent female in the workings of poetics. (360)

I would add that Silence's name incorporates not only the impossibility of a totalizing linguistic form but underscores also the impossibility of a totalizing physical form. From the privileged vantage point of the reader, who can see what the characters within the romance cannot, that is, Silence's double identity—both his/her female physicality and masculine gender—the contradictions implicit in Silence's name serve again as a reminder of the ambivalence of his/her physical form and the latent contradictions of his/her gender performance.

Bloch, like Cooper, relates the contradictions associated with Silence's name to the difficulty of the poet, and then extends the analogy further to include the work of the literary critic:

In conclusion, the *Roman de Silence* symptomizes the paradox of the poet who speaks the impossibility both of silence and of an always already dislocated speech. Its heroine, by her own account, represents the specular image of that which poetry cannot say, which is that to speak the truth is to be disinherited.... To name oneself—'Silence ai non' (v. 6140)—is to contradict oneself, as the myriad of contradictions attached to the name joins what we might think of as the fiction of fiction or the poet's desire 'to begin without making a sound'...to the critic's desire to have the last word by making Silence speak and, finally, to silence her. (99)

Indeed, there is a certain discord involved in writing a romance about silence, and in critiquing such a work. Furthermore, the dislocation of speech to which Bloch refers recalls the impossibility of direct reference and questioning of perfect meaning reflected in the labile nature of Silence's name and his/her gender.

Finally, on a juridico-political level and within the context of the thirteenth-century society of the romance, Silence's name also enables him/her to construct an identity that subverts the law that makes this name a necessity. This is the perspective of Labbie, who, drawing on Butler's work on naming and subject formation from *Bodies That Matter*, investigates the manner in which "Silence's name 'works as a politically invested and investing performative' that 'sustains the integrity of the body,' even while it undermines and transgresses the very law that imposes its force through the name (Butler 72)" (64). Labbie distinguishes between Silence's indeterminate Old French name and his/her sexually marked Latinate name, arguing that this flexibility frees Silence from traditional gendered categorization:

The changeable name then becomes replaced in a positive context that perceives its liberatory potential, rather than its erasure of identity.... While Silence may appear to be the victim of a changing signifier, it is the

very flexibility of the signifier that enables her to adapt to and affect the patrilinear law. Since the Old French name does not confine Silence to sex or gender categories, it signifies her self, while the Latinate name merely enables the public to categorize her as male/female, masculine/feminine. (67)

For Labbie, however, while the self Silence constructs is fluid—"a representative of her own process of becoming" (74)—it is distinctly female: "Silence's identity, initially constructed by her masculinized Latinate name, is revealed throughout the romance to be not a state, but a complex process that enables female subjectivity to transcend purely anatomical 'nature' as well as constructed appearance or 'nurture'" (64). Thus, whereas Labbie argues that Silence's inner self has been freed from the restrictions of traditional binary gender categories, she continues to view this as a "female subjectivity" rather than a generically indeterminate or hybrid subjectivity. Labbie sees in Silence evidence of a new, unrestricted female subjectivity that is not fixed or restrained by the limitations of the law. The act of performing as a male, with a sexually indeterminate name, creates for Silence a fluid identity *as a female*, in Labbie's analysis. While I would agree with Labbie that Silence's indeterminate Old French name enables him/her to negotiate the restrictions of the law, I do not see that the self that Silence constructs through this flexible and indeterminate signifier is a specifically female subjectivity. Rather, I would suggest again that the combination of Silence's male performance and his/her female physicality create a complex dual subjectivity that in its very existence refutes the necessity for a single-sexed (or single-gendered) identity.

WORDPLAY: (CON)FUSING LANGUAGE, SEX, AND GENDER

Ambiguities that occur on the textual level in the form of polyvalent significations and contradictory or oppositional meaning proliferate throughout the *Roman de Silence* and have also occasioned a number of critical studies. Perret identifies ambiguous or open-ended linguistic forms and the questioning of perfect meaning as characteristic not only of the *Roman de Silence* but of other medieval romances featuring cross-dressing as well (334). In her essay, "Travesties et Transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchandine," Perret considers five broad types of linguistic ambiguity that she sees as reflective of the sexual ambiguity of these four medieval cross-dressed characters. Perret's five categories will serve me as a frame in which to organize the remainder of my comments regarding linguistic equivocality and fluidity in the *Roman de Silence*.

Wordplay based on the character's proper name, usually involving suffixes and rhymes, is the first type of linguistic ambiguity that Perret considers (334). Since I have already discussed some of the contradictions and ambiguities implied in Silence's name, I will add here simply that Perret notes that such wordplay occurs frequently throughout all four of the texts that she studies. As an example of a passage from the *Roman de Silence*, Perret cites the scene describing the baptism of Silence in which Silence's parents rationalize their choice of the child's name and explain the way in which they will change the gender of the suffix if ever Silence's identity is discovered:

Se nos li tolons dont cest -us
 Nos li donrons natural us,
 Car cis -us est contre nature,
 Mais l'altres [=a] seroit par nature. (2079–82)

The removal of the *-us* will give Silence more natural custom (*us*), they reason, because the masculine *-us* is “against nature,” whereas the other (the feminine ending, *-a*) would be “according to nature.”

The simultaneous use of two referential terms, one masculine, the other feminine, is Perret's second category. As she notes, this further emphasizes the hybrid nature of the character (335). From the *Roman de Silence*, she lists “li vallés qui est mescine” (3785, 3704, 3763, 3871) and “Car mescine avront vallet/Et de lor fille un oir mallet” (2209–10). In contrast, Gaunt reads the term “li vallés mescine” and the variants thereon as an assertion of Heldris's essentialist view of sexual difference: “For Heldris signifiers must be appropriate to their referent. Heldris draws attention to this fact continually in the scenes where Eufeme attempts to seduce Silence by referring to her [sic] as *li vallés mescine* (the man-girl) or *li vallés qui est mescine* (3763, 3785 and so on)” (208). Gaunt goes on to take issue with Bloch's reading of this epithet as a sign of “the very undetermined nature of Silence” (Bloch 89), stating that the epithet “occurs only rarely elsewhere in the romance” and that it could “equally well be read as highly determined, meaning ‘the boy who is really a girl,’ as if Heldris were particularly concerned to highlight the fact that Silence is really female when talking of the one act that she cannot perform as a man: the sexual act” (208). Yet, if we were to read this epithet as the highly determined essentialist assertion that Gaunt proposes, then much of the ironic tone and humor of Silence's predicament would be lost. It is the contrast between the other characters' narrow, one-sided misreading of Silence's status and the reader's awareness of his/her dual condition that creates the tension and the appeal of Silence's situation. If Silence were simply “really” a girl, and the other characters were only just bad readers, then the romance would lose its considerable depth and nuance.

In addition to the epithet “li vallés mescine” (and its variants), we can also find the simultaneous use of masculine and feminine referential terms in passages such as Cador's explanation to the young Silence that *he* is a *girl*, “il entent bien qu'il est mescine” (2440, my emphasis); and the narrator's allusion to Silence's female body, “Il est desos les dras mescine” (2480, my emphasis). These examples and others through the text emphasize again and again Silence's dual nature. Neither uniquely female or male, Silence embodies both. However, in keeping with the rest of his essay, Gaunt also disagrees with this reading of Silence's hybridism. He argues instead that Heldris avoids linguistic ambiguity at all cost: “The most obvious area in which Heldris could have privileged linguistic indeterminacy is in the gendering of pronouns and adjectives. Yet, with one significant exception, Silence is designated by masculine pronouns and adjectives throughout the period she lives as a man, even by people who know she is really female” (207). The one exception, according to Gaunt, is located in the second exchange between Nature and Nurture. However, I have found many other examples of linguistic indeterminacy throughout the text. In addition, I would take issue with Gaunt's statement that even those

characters who know that Silence is “really female” refer to her as a man. If Silence is living, acting, performing, existing as a man, what does it mean to be “really female”? If Gaunt is referring to Silence’s chromosomal or sexual makeup, I would assert that that has little bearing on his/her identity within this romance.

Another type of wordplay that occurs frequently in medieval transvestite romances is the use of terms to describe a young woman that do not correspond to the situation at hand. In the *Roman de Silence* Perret notes, for example, the use of female terms in a combat scene, as well as gendered neologisms and other gendered wordplay, such as the use of the term *desvaleter* (335–36). In the *Roman de Silence* Cador states that if Silence’s sex is ever discovered, “Cesti ferons desvaleter” (2047). Perret explains that this neologism, signifying the retransformation of a boy into a girl, is based on the model of *despucler*, to take a young girl’s virginity, which is indeed, she points out, the primary problem that the cross-dressed characters encounter (336). Gaunt also discusses this neologism, noting that it derives from the word *valet* (a young man) and “probably therefore means ‘to unsex,’ but it must also give the sense ‘to deprive of masculinity’” (216 n.14). For Gaunt, this provides yet another example of Heldris’s antifeminism as it echoes the Freudian notion that “a woman is a castrated man” (216 n.14). Jewers additionally finds in [*d*]esvaleter an example of Heldris’s misogyny or “linguistic double-standard”: “It stands out as a concept when we compare it to its gender-reversed term, *depucler*; while one conveys pragmatic innocence and revalidation, the other does not share the same value in social currency” (95). But how can the reader take seriously the narrator’s misogynistic outbursts when he controverts them through Silence’s demeanor and speech almost as soon as he has uttered them?⁹ It is thus very difficult to see how *desvaleter* fits into the larger misogynistic stance that Gaunt and Jewers identify. Rather, Heldris’s use of *desvaleter* stands out as a creative neologism that extends a traditionally female problem to a young man, thereby blurring again the boundaries between the two genders.

Heldris’s wordplay and experimentations with direct reference also include an examination of terms that are phonically similar but differ widely graphically and linguistically (Cooper 351). These terms thus offer alternate readings of key passages of the text such as the following, when the young Eufemie decides to speak to her new love, Cador. Eufemie’s desire for Cador has so distorted her speech that it is nearly unintelligible:

Vient en la cambre a son ami
 Dist li: ‘Amis, parlés, haymmi!’
 Dire li dut: ‘Parlés a moi,’
 Mais l’Amours li fist tel anoi
 Que dire dut: “Parlés a mi,’
 Se li a dit: Parlés, haymmi’
 ‘Parlés a mi’ dire li dut,
 Mais ‘haymmi’ sor le cuer li jut.
 Si tost com ele ot dit ‘amis,’
 En la clauze ‘havmmi!’ a mis.

‘Ami’ dut dire, et ‘haymmi!’ a dist,
Por la dolor qui en li gist. (881–92)¹⁰

A perusal of some of the translations of this puzzling and garbled commentary reiterates the confusion among critics who attempt to make sense of the manner in which Heldris plays with the inconstant nature of language as he (con)fuses gender. Cooper notes that the text itself “tells us about the various dislocations which the terms *a moi* (‘to me’), *a mi* (‘to me’ or ‘to the middle’), *amis* (‘friend’) and *haymmi* (‘alas!’) have undergone before being uttered as the reader sees them” (351). Bloch’s translation of the term *haymmi* as “hate me,” rather than “alas” gives a very different meaning to the passage.¹¹ He concludes that “Desire alienates language which, alienated, becomes an even greater source of desire and the desire for language” (94). Ringer, like Bloch, translates *haymmi* as “hate me” instead of “alas” or “to the middle” (10), while Roche-Mahdi translates *Parlés, haymmi!* as “Speak, ah me!” Psaki, on the other hand, chooses “alas” and comments on the various possible significations of this passage: “Eufemie’s phrase is *haymmi*; the narrator’s lengthy and obtrusive rehearsal of the verbal distortion her emotion produces, and Cador’s obsessive interpretative activity, throws this issue into high relief” (181 n. 2).

Cooper additionally draws attention to the wordplay in the passage in which Cador replies to Eufemie:

Se nule cose avés averse,
Ma vie doi mener *enverse*:
Plorer de vostre aversité,
Rire en vostre prospérité. (929–32, my emphasis)¹²

The two possible meanings of the term “*enverse*” that Cooper suggests again give to this passage its poetic richness and open-endedness: “Cador’s speech is here synonymous with poetic discourse in general, for he vows to enter into that specular relation (*enverse*: upside down) with Eufemie which is the relation of the poet to the white and feminine text, that relation which impels the poet to create *en verse* (in verse)” (Cooper 352). And Cooper points out the wordplay associated with the use of the term *conte*, meaning “story” or “tale” and *conte*, meaning “count,” or a member of the royal hierarchy (344 n. 4):¹³

Silence is indeed the textual conjecture of perfection: the offshoot of a ‘*conte*’ and the origin of the ‘*conte*,’ the successful conjunction of erotic desire and heritable form, of creation and tradition, of absence and presence, of female and male textualities, of nature and culture—in sum, she is that hypothesis of truth, of ultimate articulation, to which the poet aspires. (Cooper 343–44)

The “conjunctions” that Cooper identifies seem to me to underscore also Silence’s composite status. Where Cooper focuses on the “perfection” of Silence as the embodiment of the “hypothesis of truth,”¹⁴ I would emphasize the complex pluralism of his/her sexual and textual identity. Indeed, I see Heldris as undermining the aspiration for *a perfect truth* through the multiple ambiguities of this romance.

Bloch too points out numerous wordplays in the *Roman de Silence* that arise from the phonetic similarity of two terms and which underscore repeatedly the instability of meaning:

Read at the level of the letter, the *Roman de Silence* can be said to be based upon a series of graphemic displacements—of prefixes (Nature/Noretture, ozer/glozer, medecine/mescine); of suffixes (Eufeme/Eufemie, Silentius/ Silentia); of accents (conte/conté); of accents and letters (oire/oirre/oir/oïr), etc. And it can be said to be about a series of stolen letters. (96)¹⁵

Bloch then demonstrates the manner in which these graphemic displacements intersect with and reinforce the message of misplaced and stolen letters to highlight the falsity of the written or spoken word.

The series of stolen letters to which Bloch refers constitutes a central portion of the romance in which correspondances between Ebain, Eufeme, and the King of France reveal the ease with which one can misrepresent and distort written communication. In this section of the romance, Ebain exiles Silence to France after Eufeme reports (falsely) that Silence has attempted to seduce her. In place of the *laissez-passer* that Ebain had written to the King of France, however, Eufeme secretly substitutes a letter requesting the King to behead the letter’s bearer. The French King and his men are confused by the letter and send another message to Ebain asking for clarification, along with the original letter of execution. Ebain is furious and ashamed when he reads the letter of execution that the French King had received, purportedly from Ebain himself. Eventually, Ebain’s chancellor is able to uncover Eufeme’s forgery but Ebain instructs the chancellor not to reveal Eufeme’s part in the affair since this would reflect poorly on the king himself. Instead, the chancellor returns to the King of France a message claiming that an evil count (“cuens paltoniers”) had switched the two letters because he hated the “boy” (“Canja les lettres par envie”) and wanted Silence killed (5112–5114). Bloch emphasizes again the thematics of misrepresentation and polysemy that this series of letters exposes, as he highlights the inevitable, “scandalous” nature of verbal dislocation:

The letter is always already dislocated and...silence, spoken, always distorts.... The tale does not simply reflect the distortions of human intention it supposedly portrays but actually produces them.... Taken literally, the felonious tale (‘cuens paltoniers’) perverts the letter because of jealousy or desire (‘Canja les lettres par envie’), which, because it is also the sign of desire for the letter, transforms the romance into a map of its own misreadings. (98–99)

The process of poetic production, like the art of the *trouvère*, and the creation of Silence him/herself, is always already mediated. Bloch's subtle analysis establishes, in my view correctly, the relationship between the textual portrayal and production of the impossibility of direct representation.

Gilmore's surprising analysis of the role of allegory in the *Roman de Silence*, "Allegory in Ruin or Womb of Irony," does not focus on textual ambiguity per se, but as she reads "below the surface" of the text, she highlights how open the interpretation of this romance can be. Through a series of close readings of key passages, Gilmore offers a variant reading of the text that underscores the central role of Merlin. Gilmore identifies Merlin as the personification of reading and of allegory, and demonstrates that such an analysis reveals the potentially transformative power of the romance. For example, Gilmore examines the passage in which Merlin describes to Silence the revitalizing power of Nurture:

Jo ai veü jadis enter
 Sovent sor sur estoc dolce ente,
 Par tel engien et tele entente
 Que li estos et li surece
 Escrut trestolt puis en haltece. (5916–20)

Gilmore cites Roche-Mahdi's translation of the passage ("I have often seen /a young bud grafted onto sterile stock/with such skill and purposefulness /that both stock and graft soon grew and flourished"), and then comments on the life-giving and transformative powers that Merlin depicts as themselves an allegory of the function of allegorical *figura*, and of the inseparable relationship of form to content. As Gilmore notes, in these words Merlin emphasizes to Silence "that the power of Nurture, adding otherness, can be vital to generation: Nature is often sterile without a skillful grafting-on of unnatural yet life-giving forms. Natural figures are dead to understanding if not read allegorically; Nurture is the perversion of adding peripheral knowledge to quicken understanding" (Gilmore 112). Then, following this analysis, Gilmore rereads the same passage to arrive at a deeper (or higher?) level of analysis regarding allegory's promise for enhanced understanding:

Merlin's image of the grafted tree underlines the role of allegorical intent in art. *Engien* means art; *entente*, intention or understanding; *estos*, essence; *surece*, that which is added; and *haltece*, height. The passage thus says: 'understanding the essence through that which is added to it moves one vertically to a higher level of understanding.' The essence and the covering are transformed by union in allegorical interpretation, to yield a product of meaning greater than the mere sum of the two parts. (113)

Gilmore concludes, however, that there is in the end no real change or transformation because King Ebain does not accept Merlin's reading of Silence's gender, in which Merlin, "as allegorical messenger, pierces the veil to the transcendent union of figure and

essence,” of Silence’s male clothes and female sex: “Had the King accepted Merlin’s reading of Silentius’s gender and fused that realization with what he knew of her virtues and strengths, he would have grasped the whole woman who transcended the limitations of either component” (118). Ultimately, according to Gilmore’s analysis, only Merlin is able to read this text correctly: “What could or should have been a *texte de jouissance* for Merlin’s audience, was such only for himself.... The order is essentially unchanged: allegorical understanding has not taken us to the new world promised; Merlin alone resides there, laughing” (119). Yet, whereas Gilmore’s essay arrives at an elegant analysis of Merlin’s role and of allegory in the *Roman de Silence*, she restricts her conclusions to the insights of the characters within the narrative. Although she is correct to conclude that none of the other characters within the romance perceive the truth of Merlin’s reading of allegory, the attentive reader must. The reader (or audience) of this romance sees much that the characters within it cannot see. Moreover, this privileged perspective is crucial to an appreciation of the multiple ambiguities of this text, many of which explore a radical departure from traditional binary thinking.

Finally, in Perret’s last category of linguistic ambiguity, the central role of language and wordplay itself becomes a key theme. Perret states that in many of the medieval texts that feature female cross-dressers the entire discourse is contaminated by a questioning of the linguistic code to the degree that we often encounter utterances that are strikingly dislocated, enigmatic and dense (336). Perret notes the inextricable relationship between thematic ambiguity and wordplay: “Aussi n’y a-t-il pas lieu de s’étonner du rôle capital que joue le langage dans les textes les plus élaborés de notre corpus. C’est que seul le langage permet de dire et de penser l’ambiguïté” (336). As an example of the explicit use of language as a theme in the *Roman de Silence*, she cites “le motif de l’aveu impossible entre Cador et Eufémie, et le lapsus qui les trahit ...[et] dont le vers clé est peut-être ‘Sens de feme gist en taisir’ (v. 6398)” (336).

Reading or misreading as a theme and its relationship to textual indeterminacy figure prominently also in the essay of Peter Allen, “The Ambiguity of Silence.” Allen likens the *Roman de Silence* to Barthes’s *texte de jouissance* in its resistance to a straightforward reading. Allen finds multiple ambiguities within the text of the *Roman de Silence* and in its printed form. Of the title, Allen asks rhetorically: “How can silence provoke a poem, let alone a romance?” He notes also that the manuscript Mi.LM.6 contains “a number of odd features that seem intimately related to the peculiarities of the text” (99). Allen adds that Lewis Thorpe’s editorial commentary is “riddled with hypotheses and frustrations” as it attempts to impose a single interpretation on determinedly ambiguous passages of the text (99,104).¹⁶ And Allen finds numerous ambiguities in the romance’s plot itself, including the “almost identical names” of Eufemie and Eufeme, both of which “valorize speech”; Silence’s gender (“and the Latin and French names that are used both to conceal and to reveal it”); and “the presence of poets and poetry within the poem itself and their relationship to a poet [Silence] whose name implies the absence of all sound and, hence, poetry” [100]).

In Allen’s opinion, the *Roman de Silence* teaches the reader how to read and appreciate a difficult text. He even goes so far as to state that an unambiguous reading of *Silence* would destroy the text itself: “We cannot remove the ambiguities from the romance without breaking its silence” (99). Allen stresses repeatedly the existence of these multiple levels of ambiguities and offers a number of possible theoretical

approaches to the romance: “[It]... can be read...as a characteristic of female writing...unwilling to accommodate itself to male readings; as a Marxist text refusing to accept capitalist modes of textual diffusion; as a medieval ‘other’ that will not bow to modern assumptions; as a Freudian polymorphous perversity..., etc.” (109–110). He also notes that one of the advantages of Heldris’s use of the vernacular language, *Romans*, rather than Latin is that while Latin requires gender specifications (e.g., Scilenti^{us} or Scilenti^a), *Romans* “avoids definitions of gender” (e.g., Silence) (109). Concluding his essay with dramatic emphasis on the interactive nature of the *Roman de Silence* as a *texte de jouissance*, Allen again underscores the mysterious and indistinct quality of Silence: “We can, and perhaps must, read and be read, enter into the world of *Romans*, of the *roman*, and see what we can experience of mute *-e* in the gap between *-us* and *-a*, in the ambiguity of silence” (110). Allen thus seems to read the ambiguity of Silence as an indefinite, neutral, *in-between* state, rather than as incorporating both genders. He does not consider Silence’s power as a hybrid. In the end, even while Allen declares the romance extraordinarily ambiguous, he arrives at an unambiguous reading of the conclusion as a loss (a *castration*) for Silence and a return to tradition.

THE INCONSTANT NARRATIVE VOICE

Moving beyond the linguistic and thematic ambiguities to point out contradictions and ambiguities in the narrative voice itself, Psaki identifies the “partisan narrative stance which flatly contradicts the plot’s own assumptions and exigencies” as one of the “revolutionary features” of the romance (“Introduction” to *Silence* xvii). She also stresses that whereas Heldris sets the stage for a debate between the powers of Nature and Nurture in the determination of Silence’s gender, neither Heldris nor the narrator sides with one or the other:

Ultimately, however, Heldris has opened up a speculative space in which the two may contest; he will not opt for any dogmatic manifesto in favor of either.... What, then, does the author—or the narrator, for that matter—conclude or suggest about gender? More specifically, are gendered qualities innate for him? Again, he may have a suspicion, but he does not discount the other possibilities either. (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxii–xxix)

Psaki further emphasizes the instability of the narrative voice and the manner in which the narrator repeatedly refutes his own statements, especially at the end of the romance. This point holds particular bearing on the final interpretation of this text since, for most scholars, the question of whether the *Roman de Silence* is ultimately misogynistic or feminist hinges on their reading of the closing passages. Psaki highlights the contradictions in the concluding passages:

The layering of narration in the text is dense, and nowhere more so than at its close. Throughout the text we have an obtrusive but unstable narrating voice which contradicts itself explicitly and implicitly. The epilogue

claims to derive a lesson from *Silence*, a conclusion about nature in general and female nature in particular, which conclusion has been thoroughly disproven in the romance itself [6684–91]. (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxx–xxxi)

Psaki’s insistence on the unreliability and inconstancy of the narrating voice runs counter to the analysis of a number of other scholars. Krueger, for example, identifies a clear development in the narrating voice, particularly in his misogyny: “Heldris’s antifeminist stance becomes more pronounced as the romance unfolds.... In the Prologue, the narrator is generally misanthropic rather than misogynistic.... Heldris’s bitterness resurfaces frequently in the narrative that follows, however, and his attacks focus increasingly on women” (113). Drawing on Thorpe’s description of the embedded intertextuality of an episode from the *Estoire de Merlin*¹⁷ in which the cross-dressed Grisandole captures Merlin who then reveals the empress of Rome’s adulterous relationship, Krueger states that “an antifeminist moral structures the entire narrative” (113). Yet, although Krueger correctly looks to “sexual tensions in the social context” involving controversies “about gender issues in which women may have participated, even though their voices have been silenced” (105) to understand better the construction of gender roles within society and within the romance during this period, she ascribes, in my view erroneously, a pointed and coherent perspective to the author/narrator. Concerning *Silence*’s success as a knight, Krueger maintains that Heldris attributes this strictly to “her” lineage:

Far from asserting *Silence*’s claim that valorous achievements as a knight are proof of what women could do if only they were given the chance, Heldris makes it clear that her [sic] disguise is an unnatural aberration and what good she *does* achieve is by virtue of her good character, exceptional for her sex, which seems indirectly linked to her noble upbringing. Her role as a man is unnatural and illegitimate. (117–18, emphasis original)

This too is Nature’s opinion,¹⁸ but Nurture and the actions of *Silence* him/herself present quite a different point of view.

Certainly there is ample evidence to support a reading of the narrative voice of the *Roman de Silence* as profoundly unstable and contradictory. The narrator states, for example, that nature overpowers nurture and then he contradicts himself. He declares first that no man has the power to overcome Nature in the long run (“Segnor, par Deu, Nature a droit!/Car nus hom tel pooir n’aroit/Qu’il peüst vaintre et engignier/Nature al loig, ne forlignier” [2295–2298]) and uses the analogy of the relative strength of honey and gall to illustrate his argument that bad nurture has a greater effect on good nature than does good nurture on bad nature (“Prover le puis par cest affaire/C’uns petis hanas plains de fiel/Honiroit plus un mui de miel/ C’uns muis de miel n’amenderoit/Un lot de fiel, ki l’I metroit./En un poi de vil noretur/Empire plus bone nature/Que longhe aprisons de bienfaire /Puist amender cuer de pute aire” [2334–2342]), only to conclude at a later point that proper behavior results ultimately from proper upbringing:

Oue bien ait tols iors bons usages.

[Car] bons us tolt moult vilonie
 Et fait mener cortoise vie.
 Car bons us a qui bone vie uze
 Et vilonie le refuse.
 Mains hom fait tols jor de s'onor
 Que s'il eüst flairié honor
 Et maintenue de l'enfance
 Ki n'avroit cure de viltance.
 S'il fait le honte n'en puet nient
 Qu'a cho qu'il a apris se tient. (5166–5176)

The narrator again contradicts himself when he characterizes Eufeme's love as hatred ("Si l'aime un petit le roïne/Cui amors valt une haïne" [5221–5222]), as does Silence:

Dame, fait il a la roïne,
 L'amors valut une haïne.
 Et quant si fait sont vostre amer
 Et por noient, dame, clamer,
 Bien doit on vostre amor haïr,
 Car vostre amer valt bien traïr,
 Et tuer home, et desmembrer. (5709–5715)

But the narrator's comments on women's nature and her ability to hide her feelings run directly counter to those of the chancellor as he describes women's ability to deceive men. Speaking to himself in prison, as the chancellor tries to figure out why Queen Eufeme might have wanted to alter his own letter to the King of France, the chancellor states:

Mais nus hom ne puet feme ataindre
 Quant el se violt covrir et faindre.
 Feme vait par son bel samblant
 Le sens del siecle tolt enblant.
 Sens d'ome sage poi ataint
 Por feme ataindre qui se faint....
 Car feme nen est pas lanriere
 D'engiens trover en tel maniere.
 Engignose est por home nuire
 Plus que por un grant bien estruire. (5001–5006; 5013–5016)¹⁹

In the epilogue the narrator adds to this discussion of “women’s nature” by offering a lesson, supposedly drawn from the *Roman de Silence*, in which he declares that good behavior is “unnatural” to women and should therefore be lauded whenever possible:

Maistre Heldris dist chi endroit
 C’on doit plus bone feme amer
 Que haïr malvaise u blasmer.
 Si mosterroie bien raison,
 Car feme a menor oquoison
 Por que ele ait le liu ne l’aise
 De l’estre bone que malvaise,
 S’ele ouevre bien contre nature. (6684–91)

This conclusion, however, has already been convincingly refuted within the romance, as Psaki has noted (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxx–xxxi).

Immediately following this inconclusive conclusion, the narrator draws a distinction between Eupheme, an evil woman, and Silence, a good “woman”:

Bien mosterroie par droiture
 C’on en doit faire gregnor plait
 Que de celi qui le mal fait.
 Se j’ai jehi blasme Eufeme
 Ne s’en doit irier bone feme.
 Se j’ai Eufeme moult blasme
 Jo ai Silence plus loë. (6692–6698)

But if Silence is this text’s exception, can we infer that Silence is an exceptionally good, honest and valorous *woman* precisely because she has been raised as a man rather than a woman? And if so, what should the reader make of Eufemie, Silence’s mother, “who is perfectly good and virtuous in her own (female) sphere” (Psaki, “Introduction” to *Silence* xxxi)? The narrator describes several female types, including the evil woman and the virtuous, as he also underscores through the character of Silence the limitations of society’s traditional treatment of women.

The narrator’s “ingenuous rambling” (Psaki, “Text Editing” 84) regarding the distinction between Eupheme and Silence seem to be an attempt to subdue or appease the imagined disapproval of Heldris’s women readers or audience members. Krueger notes that whereas the narrator’s only previous reference to his audience’s sex has been an address to “seignors” (line 1798), in his concluding lines he here identifies women (“bone feme”) as the potential critics of his romance (125).²⁰ Yet, he again controverts his own comments in the lines that follow:

Ne s'en doit irier bone fame,
 Ne sor li prendre altrui blasme,
 Mais efforcier plus de bien faire. (6699–6701)

Psaki states: “There is no coherence to the sequence of placating remarks which Heldris makes in backing his way out of his text” (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxxi). In the final analysis, Psaki argues, the reader ought not rely too heavily on the words of this narrator who has proven himself unreliable throughout the romance:

‘Contre nature’ indicates the narrator’s conviction—borne out by the last Nature-Nurture debate—that women are tendentially inclined toward evil. But is not the narrator traducing his tale, or does not the overwhelming evidence of the tale bely his superficial conclusion? Ultimately we must look skeptically at the explicit assertions of a narrator who simplifies or reverses the complexities of his tale; and I would argue that the author of *Silence* intended us to read his ponderous narrator with more than a grain of salt. (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxxi–xxxii)

The narrator’s own inconsistent statements and the contradictions between his declarations and the evidence that the reader sees in the behavior of Silence and other characters add additional layers of complexity to the “truth” of this romance. Rather than taking the narrator’s various assertions at face value, the reader must look between the lines, questioning the validity of such incongruent opinions. As the character of Silence him/herself makes clear, the most immediately apparent level of meaning is not necessarily the most accurate.

HYBRID LITERARY GENRES

The *Roman de Silence* thus features linguistic indeterminacies in the form of wordplay, neologisms, the juxtaposing of contradictory nouns and pronouns, and open-ended meanings, as well as an unreliable and contradictory narrator. Neither can the work be neatly categorized according to a traditional medieval literary genre or subject matter. It destabilizes romance conventions and feminizes *aventure* (Jewers 88) as it replaces the traditional male hero with a biologically female cross-dresser. Psaki suggests that there may not have been any traceable critical response to the *Roman de Silence* until well after its publication in book form by Lewis Thorpe in 1972 precisely because the *Roman de Silence* did not match the model of the “canonical” romance in form or content (“Introduction to *Silence*” xiv–xvi).²¹ Scholars simply didn’t know what to do with such an unfamiliar text.

Jewers, who refers to Heldris’s “almost avant-garde treatment of the extended romance form and its classical themes” (91), identifies three narrative “openings” of the romance which include two different literary genres. The first opening, describing King

Ebain's political troubles and the resulting marriage to Eufeme as his "rightful booty" (Brahney 55), "evokes the masculine ethos of the *chanson de geste*" (Jewers 98). The second opening, concerning the dynastic feud between the two counts, which leads to Ebain's ruling against female inheritance, "also belongs to the paradigm of the *chanson de geste*.... Once more, women denote access to power and wealth without possessing either themselves" (Jewers 99). The third opening, describing the courtship and marriage of Silence's parents, incorporates instead key components of the *roman courtois*. Jewers notes that the circumstances of the union of Cador and Eufemie "belong as much to courtly romance as the previous segments belong to the more inflexible ethos of the feudal epic. The narrator characterizes their story (337–1650) as a *mervellose aventure* (344) which spans the length of the typical *lai*, and in tone, style and subject matter recalls Marie [de France]'s works" (99). Jewers finds in this segment adventurous exploits that are "tinged with comic irony," and "a string of commonplace *topoi* about love-sickness" as "knightly adventure gives way to feminized *amor*" (100).

The remainder of the romance, describing Silence's birth and cross-dressed adventures, is itself a generic hybrid, as Jewers explains:

Significantly, Silence is born into a literary space that slips between the paradigms of feudal epic and of the *roman courtois*. From the time of her birth, women occupy the narrative foreground, while the male characters are reduced to Auerbach's accessorial place, and effectively become the 'exterior forms of life'.... Of the central women characters only Silence occupies the privileged space in which adventure is possible, and her freedom of movement contrasts strongly with the confinement of her mother and foster-mother. (Jewers 100)

Of course, I would take issue with Jewer's reference to Silence as one of "the central woman characters," arguing that Silence is not a woman, but rather a cross-dressed hybrid. Furthermore, it is only Silence, this male-female hybrid, who "occupies the privileged space in which adventure is possible."

For Jewers, then, the *Roman de Silence* is concerned less with interrogating the gender binary and the relationship of the sociopolitical to the construction of sex and gender, and more with reworking the traditional models of Old French courtly literature. I would suggest, however, that one need not exclude the other. I see the romance's presentation of the cultural construction of gender as clear and strongly argued, and I read the atypical fusion of literary paradigms as reinforcing on yet another level the hybrid materiality of Silence and of the narrative. On each level, this text resists easy categorization and presents instead a complex fusion of gender and genre. Through the use of wordplay, linguistic ambiguities, an unreliable narrator, and the fusion of literary genres, as well as the thematics of an indeterminate, hybridic character, the *Roman de Silence* questions the validity of determinate meaning. Repeatedly, this romance highlights double (or multiple) interpretations or levels of meaning, and those characters, such as Nature and Nurture, who attempt to argue for a single perspective see their arguments belied in the composite and unfixed character of Silence.

LINGUISTIC AND NARRATIVE AMBIGUITIES IN *L'ENFANT DE SABLE*

Like the *Roman de Silence*, *L'Enfant de sable* is also an ambiguous text, structurally, linguistically, thematically and generically. The narrative ambiguity of *L'Enfant de sable* is so profound and striking that Anne Chevalier goes so far as to suggest in “‘Le Voile des fables’ dans *L'Enfant de sable*” that the novel is ultimately senseless and that this is itself the deep meaning of the work:

Tout le livre est ‘narcissique’ au sens où il est commandé par un système d’autoréflexion, le sujet de l’histoire se réverbérant dans les processus du récit, ambigus, impossibles à ramener à une totalité cohérente et rationalisable. Une enquête sur la signification du livre de Ben Jelloun doit d’abord prendre garde à ce fait; expliquer un texte presuppose que le texte a un sens et que d’une manière ou d’une autre le *mûthos* peut rejoindre le *lógos*. Peut-être est-ce l’impossibilité de cette fusion qui est le thème profond de notre roman. (“‘Le Voile des fables’” 62)

But although the absence of narrative linearity, the multiple and contradictory narrative voices and general narrative opacity figure in many critical studies of *L'Enfant de sable*, Chevalier points out that the novel does not begin in an exceptionally indirect or abstruse manner (62).

Initially, *L'Enfant de sable* seems to be constructed along the line of a traditional folktale, as outlined by Propp: A king and a queen cannot have a child; they obtain, by means of some “detour,” the desired child; however, this child is fragile and threatened since he represents the transgression of a prohibition; the remainder of the plot revolves around how this child will be able to overcome these obstacles and the initial “malediction” (Chevalier 62). Chevalier also notes that such structural markers as chapter divisions are symmetrical and organized in a logical and predictable fashion. The novel comprises nineteen chapters, of which the middle one, chapter 10, entitled “Le conteur dévoré,” is itself divided into two sections, each of which corresponds to the development of the life of *l'enfant de sable*. In the first half of the book, two successive narrators and extracts from Ahmed’s supposed journal recount the story of Ahmed’s birth, childhood, education, marriage, loss of spouse, and eventual “reclusion” (63). Although we encounter gaps and uncertainties in this first half of the book, Chevalier states that the narrative remains focused: “Malgré des lacunes et des incertitudes, une certaine continuité demeure, tout est centré sur ce personnage androgyne et sa difficulté d’être” (63). She sees the hybrid character of Ahmed as forming the axis of this structure: “Le livre est donc fortement structuré par cette disposition symétrique en deux volets dont l’axe est formé par une ligne imaginaire qui va du corps, le personnage homme-femme, porteur du secret, au livre, le personnage multiple du conteur qui prétend détenir ce secret et le dévoiler aux auditeurs, mais qui est soumis lui-même aux aléas de l’imagination” (63).

As in a medieval quest narrative, the reader is drawn into the story progressively by the narrators who each claim to hold a key that will bring the reader closer to discovering the secret and solving the riddle: “L’essentiel est de donner à croire au lecteur qu’il y a un

secret caché auquel les conteurs sont censés les conduire. Plusieurs series d'images allégoriques se répètent tout au long du livre, constituant le réseau du leurre de la découverte" (Chevalier 63). By the time the reader has reached the final "door," the "Porte des sables," which recalls, of course, the title of the novel, she realizes that there will be no clear solution, no exit from the quest. Chevalier associates the image of sand with this lack of closure:

Porte des sables, enfant de sable—c'est à dire...l'effacement de tout, qui est la mort, mais qui est aussi, à la fois, le mouvant, le changeant, la vie même. Le conteur avait, il est vrai, annoncé dès le début qu'il guiderait son auditoire vers une absence de fin: 'Vous avez choisi de m'écouter, alors suivez-moi jusqu'au bout...le bout de quoi? Les rues circulaires n'ont pas de bout' (21). (64)

In this Borgesian image of a labyrinth, each subsequent narrator becomes embedded in the narrative imagination of another. Chevalier says that this has the effect of obstructing access to reality—"La réplication infinie du conteur qui dit ses songes tout en étant lui-même le songe d'un autre,...à pour conséquence que l'on n'atteindra jamais l'issue, la réalité" (64)—but I would argue instead that it calls into question the existence of a determinate reality. The multiple and contradictory perspectives of the various narrators, each of whom claims to possess the truth and none of whom is clearly more accurate or better informed than the others, presents an image of truth as subjective and multiple. This complex narrative, which constitutes the structure of a story about a hybrid being of indeterminate identity, challenges formally and thematically the actuality of a single, unified reality.

Like the *Roman de Silence*, *L'Enfant de sable* also displays prominently the alternation or juxtaposing of gendered nouns and pronouns, and narrative ambiguity. As in the medieval romance, these narrative features have the effect of further emphasizing the physical and generic indeterminacy of the cross-dressed protagonist. Sarah Skrainka highlights this relationship in *'L'Enfant de sable': Roman de l'ambiguïté*: "L'ambiguïté de la narration et celle de l'identité se rejoignent et se renforcent mutuellement" (2). Skrainka, who considers the following forms of narrative ambiguity in her study—"interruptions et ruptures dans la continuité et la chronologie de l'intrigue; narrateurs multiples et non fiables; ambiguïtés et blancs dans le texte; contradictions" (3)—identifies these techniques as themselves hybridic, stemming both from the tradition of oral storytelling and from postmodernism (1). Skrainka expands on the influence of postmodernism on *L'Enfant de sable*, identifying a number of narrative techniques characteristic of the Nouveau Roman:

L'ambiguïté de la narration et du style démontre plusieurs caractéristiques typiques du Nouveau Roman. La chronologie irrégulière, les perturbations narratives n'en sont qu'un exemple. De plus, le narrateur omniscient et crédible n'existe pas; il fait place à une succession de narrateurs douteux qui se contredisent. Leurs récits sont liés et encadrés par la voix narrative, voix désinvolte et incorporelle. (5)

The irregular, disjointed chronology and succession of contradictory narrative voices that Skrainka identifies in *L'Enfant de sable* as typical of the Nouveau Roman combine with the multiple physical and narrative ambiguities in the novel to underscore further the rejection of determinate modes of thought.

CONFRONTING THE AUTHORITY OF THE STORYTELLER

From the very beginning, *L'Enfant de sable* is impregnated with an overriding sense of mystery and confusion. Entitled simply "Homme," the first chapter tells of a sad and lonely, anonymous man who decides in his great old age to "put his past into order" by confiding his untold secrets to a personal journal. The narrator tells us that this melancholy man lives enveloped in "un brouillard épais" (9), a dense, protective fog that shields him from the bright lights and suspicious glances of the outside world. Throughout the text, the narrative remains shrouded, secretive, ambiguous.

The primary storyteller who begins the tale explains that this enigmatic, broken man had entrusted him with his journal just before he died. The storyteller's recitation of this journal to a small audience of listeners constitutes the narrative frame of the novel. Initially, the storyteller places himself in a position of authority, explaining that he constitutes access to the book: "Vous ne pouvez y accéder sans traverser mes nuits et mon corps. Je suis ce livre" (12–13). While defending his authority, the storyteller's statement also draws into question from early on the significance of the physical book. If we can arrive at the book only through the storyteller's body, is reading anything more than subjective interpretation? Can there be an objective Truth to the story?

The storyteller also informs the audience that he will supply the keys to unlock the seven "doors" of this tale, which quickly assumes the allure of a medieval romance or mystic quest: "Sachez aussi que le livre a sept portes percées dans une muraille.... Je vous donnerai au fur et à mesure les clés pour ouvrir ces portes. En vérité les clés, vous les possédez mais vous ne le savez pas; et, même si vous le saviez, vous ne sauriez pas les tourner et encore moins sous quelle pierre tombale les enterrer" (13). And, as in a quest, the reader, as well as the "audience" of the tale, becomes immediately implicated in the search. We too embark on a grand adventure; we become accomplices.

The storyteller "welcomes" the still-unnamed character of Ahmed as he begins his tale, underscoring the duality, ambiguity and contradictions of his/her existence:

Bienvenue, ô être du lointain, visage de l'erreur, l'innocence du mensonge, double de l'ombre...tu apportes le bonheur mais pas la joie, tu lèves une tente dans le desert, mais c'est la demeure du vent, tu es un capital de cendres, ta vie sera longue, une épreuve pour le feu et la patience. Bienvenue! ô toi, le jour et le soleil! Tu haïras le mal, mais qui sait si tu feras le bien... Bienvenue... Bienvenue. (25)

Cazenave comments on the storyteller's repetition of "Bienvenue," noting the multiple ambiguities within the term itself: "The recurrence of 'Bienvenue' suggests ambiguity: the -e ending should indicate that the subject is female; 'Bienvenue' is an ellipsis for 'tu es la bienvenue,' but because it is used in its elliptical form, it can also be interpreted as

'nous te souhaitons la bienvenue,' which can address a male or a female" (446–47). Cazenave also analyzes the sentence structure in the passage, particularly the insistence on opposing concepts: "The accumulation of oxymorons such as 'l'innocence du mensonge' and the structure of the sentences based on opposition with the repetition of 'mais' also show tension and anticipate a dilemma for the character" (447). As the storyteller leads the audience/reader through this mysterious and paradoxical tale, Cazenave notes that his speech "takes on a magical power" (447).

Once the storyteller begins the tale, however, he de-emphasizes his authoritative position: "Amis du Bien, sachez que nous sommes réunis par le secret du verbe dans une rue circulaire, peut-être sur un navire et pour une traversée dont je ne connais pas l'itinéraire" (15). While the storyteller may hold the "keys" to the tale, the itinerary of this trip will most definitely not be linear, nor is our destination fixed. The storyteller also anticipates two dangers associated with storytelling, the vertigo of words and the danger of hubris (Cazenave 447): "Méfions-nous de convoquer les ombres confuses de l'ange, celui qui porte deux visages et qui habitent nos fantaisies...l'ange bascule de l'un à l'autre selon la vie que nous dansons sur un fil invisible... O mes amis, je m'en vais sur ce fil" (27). Furthermore, he tells us that pages are missing from the journal at various, crucial points in the narrative, such as when Ahmed, the journalist, reaches adolescence. These blanks necessitate the active participation of the audience. He calls on them to help him to reconstitute this stage in the story: "Dans le livre, c'est un espace blanc, des pages nues laissées ainsi en suspens, offertes à la liberté du lecteur. À vous!" (42). As the members of the audience each offer different, and conflicting, possible continuations of the story, the narrator cuts short their "rebellion" by reading again from the journal: "J'ouvre le livre, je tourne les pages blanches.... Écoutez!" (43). Whether the narrator's reference to 'white pages' is meant to describe the color of the paper or to imply that the pages were empty, devoid of words, is by now irrelevant. The seeming contradiction in "reading" from blank pages would present no greater confusion than his "guiding" us on an unknown itinerary to an unknown destination.

When the storyteller tells his audience that the character of Ahmed is "getting away" from them ("Notre personnage nous échappe" [54]), by becoming overly aggressive and mean, his statement seems to be a description of Ahmed's surpassing the bounds of his/her profile and of the narrative, rather than the narrator's criticism of Ahmed's harsh behavior. The storyteller thus underscores his own lack of control of his narration and the unstable nature of the characters of his tale. In this mysterious tale of an unfixed itinerary, based on an uncertain journal of a person of indeterminate gender, told by an unidentified storyteller who may or may not possess Ahmed's *true* journal, all truth is relative.

An anonymous correspondent is the first character within the novel to challenge Ahmed's gender identity, although there are indications that his/her uncles have had certain doubts since his/her birth. The correspondent vows to keep this knowledge secret, and he or she and Ahmed maintain a fairly lengthy exchange of letters throughout the text. The narrator, however, questions even the veracity of these letters: "Sont-elles d'un correspondant ou d'une correspondante anonyme? Ou sont-elles imaginaires? Se serait-il écrit à lui même dans son isolement?" (59). Shortly thereafter, one of the audience members rebels against the storyteller's version of the story. Calling himself Fatima's brother, he claims to know the *true* story of their marriage and of Ahmed's life. With increasing frequency, narrative ruptures and conflicts draw the reader's attention to the

inconstancies of appearance and to the inadequacies of reason. In an explicit and vigorous fashion, this novel underscores physical and narrative instability at every juncture. The “truth,” always suspect and qualified, can only ever be that which passes for true. And nothing passes for long.

JUXTAPOSING GENDERED PRONOUNS/BLURRING GENDER CATEGORIES

Ahmed’s assumption of the role of Lalla Zahra, the circus drag queen, brings to the forefront his/her hybrid nature and accelerates the breakdown of narrative linearity within the novel. Skrainka also notes this parallel narrative and physical confusion: “Cet emploi lui fournit l’occasion de vivre en société pendant qu’elle s’intègre à sa nouvelle existence. Pourtant, son évolution semble l’enforcer davantage dans l’androgynie et cela entraîne une confusion narrative” (Skrainka 31). The narrator alternates masculine and feminine pronouns to underscore his/her constant slippage between gender categories:

Notre personnage—je ne sais pas comment le nommer—devint la principale attraction du cirque forain. *Il* attirait les hommes et les femmes.... *Il* était loin de sa ville natale.... *Il* dansait et chantait.... Son corps trouvait une joie et un bonheur d’adolescent amoureux. *Elle* se cachait pour écrire. La vieille *la* surveillait. Abbas *la* protégeait. Tantôt homme, tantôt femme, notre personnage avançait dans la reconquête de son être. *Il* ne dormait plus avec les acrobates mais dans la roulotte des femmes; *elle* mangeait et sortait avec elles. On l’appelait Lalla Zahra. (126–127, my emphasis)

Although Ahmed’s parents, the anonymous correspondent, members of the storyteller’s audience and the reader had been aware of Ahmed’s dual nature for some time already, it is only at this moment that he/she receives a female name. Yet, as Skrainka states, far from becoming a woman Ahmed remains an indeterminate being: “Elle demeure un être profondément ambigu, c’est-à-dire inclassable selon les divisions classiques entre homme et femme” (31).

Odile Cazenave undertakes, in “Gender, Age, and Narrative Transformations in *L’Enfant de sable*,” a brief study of the juxtaposition of feminine and masculine markers within Ahmed’s diaries, which run in a stream-of-consciousness fashion throughout the novel. Cazenave traces a rough pattern of Ahmed’s use of male and/or female pronouns when describing him/herself:

The use of feminine marks in the writing follows accordingly a dialectic pattern: there is an absence of feminine marks, then, simultaneously, the use of both masculine and feminine marks, then again a total absence of feminine marks, and eventually, the reappearance of strictly feminine marks, and finally their systematic presence, all of which are linguistic signs of *dédoublement* in Ahmed’s personality. (441)²²

Of the entries in which Ahmed juxtaposes male and female markers, Cazenave finds a “hesitation between content and form” which here “involves the character’s sanity” (441). Ahmed’s indefinite language also “veils” his/her female sex “just like women are supposed to be” in traditional Arab culture (Cazenave 441).

When Ahmed asserts a strictly male gender with his/her father, Cazenave states that Ahmed unveils “herself”:

By claiming a male gender, she unveils herself and clarifies the ambiguity behind double-meaning words. There is a will to show the naked truth: ‘Il nous faut regarder les choses en face. Ni toi ni moi ne sommes dupes’ (50)... Language attains its full mimetic power. To pronounce the word, the pronoun that will dissipate any ambiguity as to the character’s gender, would be equivalent to undressing the body, revealing its nakedness to everybody’s eyes. (441)

However, although Ahmed declares his/her female sex to his/her father, he/she simultaneously announces his/her intention to uphold his/her male performance. Far from “revealing...[‘her’] nakedness to everybody’s eyes,” as Cazenave states, Ahmed unveils him/herself to Hadj Ahmed only to reaffirm his/her commitment to a veiled existence.

Applying Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to Ahmed’s subject formation, Cazenave notes that with the onset of adolescence Ahmed realizes that he/she is “but a product, the fabrication of an ideology and somebody else’s will” (Cazenave 442). This realization alters Ahmed’s perspective of “his” subjectivity but not his/her public performance:

Ahmed is conscious of the fact that she/he is not an autonomous being, but a creation. Once aware of the artificiality of her status as he-subject, she conquers her true subjectivity as an individual in deciding that precisely, she will be that he-subject that has been forced upon her. By dismantling herself, she deconstructs the object she was and gains that status of an individual. (442)

From this point onward, when Ahmed states “I” (“je”), his/her subject pronoun stands in contrast not so much with “You” (*à la* Benveniste, Derrida), but with the “Other” within (Cazenave 442).

NARRATIVE PLURALITY AND OPENENDEDNESS

Immediately following Ahmed’s assumption of the role of Lalla Zahra, the primary narrator who had been telling this story to an audience—alternating between recounting Ahmed’s life and reading from Ahmed’s (supposed) private journal—suddenly dies or “disappears,” having been “consumed” by the story he was telling, and Ahmed’s journal begins to decompose. A second narrator addresses the audience as participants or accomplices in the unfolding of Ahmed’s life story: “Nous sommes a present entre nous. Notre personnage va se lever. Nous l’apercevons et lui ne nous voit pas. Il se croit seul. Il

ne se sent pas épié. Tant mieux. Écoutons ses pas, suivons sa respiration, retirons le voile sur son âme fatiguée. Il est sans nouvelles de son correspondant anonyme” (109). At this point, three of the members of the original audience, Salem, Amar and Fatouma, in addition to a blind troubadour²³ and a man in a blue turban,²⁴ vie with one another to create the “true” conclusion to Ahmed-Zahra’s life story. Each maintains that he or she knows the true outcome of the story, or can invent an outcome that would be “more true,” more plausible or in keeping with Ahmed’s true character, than the others.

Several of these narrators claim to have come into close personal contact with Ahmed or to have read his/her private journal, yet each narrator recounts a dramatically different version of this life story. They deny and contradict each other and themselves. According to Salem’s narrative, Abbas perpetrated sadistic sexual acts on Ahmed-Zahra, which Salem describes in graphic detail. For Amar, Ahmed-Zahra remains a man, rather than a hybrid being or a woman. Fatouma, on the other hand, recounts her narrative in the first person: Ahmed-Zahra’s life becomes her own.²⁵ The *troubadour aveugle* gives no definitive answers, but rather calls on the readers to supply their own interpretations.

The role of the *troubadour aveugle* is significant not only because of his clear articulation of the subjective nature of narration, but also because of his physical blindness. Abbas Maazaoui underscores the importance of the recurring motif of blindness in both *L’Enfant de sable* and its continuation, *La Nuit sacrée*. She notes that the *troubadour aveugle* attributes his own inexact descriptions to his diminishing eyesight and that both Ahmed-Zahra and Fatouma make references to an inability to see clearly or to a preference for sightless communication:

Il [*le troubadour aveugle*] lui arrive même de préciser: ‘A l’époque je n’étais pas encore aveugle; ma vue baissait énormément et tout m’apparaissait flou et hachuré. Je ne peux donc décrire le visage de cette femme’ (174). Ailleurs, pour justifier son incapacité de décrire le visage d’une femme qui l’obsède, il n’hésite pas à invoquer l’oubli (188). La future narratrice de *La Nuit sacrée* se plaint dans son journal intime de son incapacité de ‘distinguer [...] les visages’ (‘Enfant’ 101). Une autre narratrice pense que ‘ce qui serait mieux, [c’est] ne pas avoir de visage du tout... Nous serions juste des voix’ (‘Enfant’ 162). (70–71)

Maazaoui also points out that in both of these novels detailed descriptions, or portraits, of women are rare and tend to be brief and posits that blindness or the inability to see clearly could be an explanation for this relative rarity (70). I would emphasize additionally the parallel between physical visual impairment and the general “blurry” narrative style which is marked by inexactitude, conjecture and disagreement.

The *troubadour aveugle* also highlights the relationship between the subjectivity of storytelling and narrative openendedness, likening narrative to a labyrinth: “Un livre, du moins tel que je le conçois, est un labyrinthe fait à dessein pour confondre les hommes, avec l’intention de les perdre et de les ramener aux dimensions étroites de leurs ambitions” (198). Chevalier further emphasizes the lack of narrative closure in *L’Enfant de sable*: “Tout le livre renvoie donc le lecteur à ses propres égarements, à moins qu’il soit capable de transcender les ‘dimensions étroites de [ses] ambitions’” (65).²⁶ Ultimately there is no final version, no narrative closure, no fixed identity. The various

endings of these narrators tell more about their own characters than they do about the life of Ahmed-Zahra. Their endings are a *mise en abyme* of the blind troubadour's theory.

The multiple possible endings that the narrators propose create the effect of further fracturing Ahmed-Zahra's identity. Skrainka states: "A travers cette intrigue imprecise, le personnage de Ahmed se manifeste sous une apparence multiple" (1). Simpson notes that the integrity of the character of Ahmed-Zahra is drawn into question: "The authority of any one voice is destroyed by the presence of so many conflicting claims to 'the truth'.... The story of Ahmed has become many stories; concomitantly, Ahmed as a character disappears as his or her self becomes increasingly fractured" (329–330). Cazenave likens the effect of the multiple narrative levels to the myriad facets of Cubist art: "Through this device, the author rounds out his character while demonstrating at the same time that he cannot be seized in his totality" (445). For Simpson, the narrative plurality makes of the novel a self-reflexive inquiry into the very process of storytelling:

Through the open-endedness of all the stories, the voices and narratives gradually accrue until the reader begins to wonder about the identity of the storytellers themselves: they may or may not be the same person, who may or may not be the person whose story they tell. By raising such questions, the novel becomes an allegory about the act of storytelling itself, and draws into question the dominant principles of the culture which produced it—and eventually its own authority as a work. (326)

Similarly, Skrainka draws a parallel between the multiple and circular narrative and Ahmed-Zahra's identity: "La problématique de l'identité se base sur deux facteurs: la qualité hybride d'une personne biologiquement féminine qui est élevée comme un garçon, et la pluralité des informations portant sur cette personne. Si Ahmed est d'une nature duelle, l'intrigue, elle, est infinie" (2). Skrainka adds: "En appliquant l'analogie du livre de sable à l'enfant de sable, l'identité de Ahmed-Zahra devient infinie" (46).

L'homme au turban bleu, an old, gray-eyed man wearing a blue turban, is the last to offer an explanation or ending. This man appears to be the original narrator (who had disappeared or perhaps even died) who has returned from a long and trying adventure. He says that his copy of Ahmed's journal was washed clean of writing by the light of a full moon, and that he himself has forgotten everything that he had read in it. He opens the conclusion to the audience: "Si quelqu'un parmi vous tient à connaître la suite de cette histoire, il devra interroger la lune quand elle sera entièrement pleine" (209). The enigmatic statements of *l'homme au turban bleu* disturb any residual belief in the authenticity of a single, verifiable journal. Simpson finds this in keeping with the subjective and mysterious presentation of Ahmed's physical body and of the passage of time within *L'Enfant de sable*: "The man with the blue turban, the last and first storyteller, reveals written words to be just another mask, like that of body and time. He presents the final notebook, saying 'everything is here', but the book is blank: 'nothing remains of what time consigned this book' [157–8], Everything in nothing" (330–31).

John Erickson distinguishes among the multiple narrators in *L'Enfant de sable* as those who attempt to describe or reinstate the dominant discourse, which in Erickson's analysis refers to male, hierarchical, Islamic, and French Colonial discourse, and the voice of Lalla Zahra:

L'histoire d'Ahmed/Zahra est racontée par de multiples voix d'une suite de conteurs/conteuses.... Ces voix, en accord avec celle de la persona mâle nommé Ahmed, articulent des notions qui répondent à des idées, des concepts, des systèmes préconçus, des choses comme elles devraient être—par exemple, la naissance d'un héritier mâle et son accession à la loi du Père—ce qui affermit le système du droit masculin à la succession dans la société islamique. Pareillement, les voix des conteurs/raconteuses et du narrateur omniscient *semblent* 'dire' des choses d'une façon indiscutable, pour ordonner et organiser les choses comme elles sont, ou comme elles devraient être par rapport à l'énonciation selon les conventions. ("Femme voilée, récit voilé" 289–90, *emphasis original*)

Erickson, who draws heavily on the deconstructionist theories of Derrida and Blanchot, states that while these narrators attempt to describe or reinstate the hegemonic discourse, the voice of Lalla Zahra "herself" offers an alternative:

La distinction de Blanchot entre ce qu'il appelle la voix narrative et la voix narratrice, et la glose de Derrida sur le texte de Blanchot, caractérisent bien et le discours de la femme enfouie dans Ahmed et le discours de l'auteur maghrébin en général. Chacun—la femme cachée et l'auteur nord-africain, comme narratrice/narrateur virtuel(le)—parle au moyen d'une voix neutre qui dit l'oeuvre à partir de ce lieu sans lieu où l'oeuvre se tait' (Blanchot): voix silencieuse, donc (glose Derrida), retirée en son 'aphonie'.... La voix narrative dans le sens que Blanchot lui donne, est la voix non vocalisée (non representable) de l'autre culturel/sexuel qui est refoulé. (288–89)

Erickson thus identifies Ben Jelloun's rejection of narrative closure as a discursive strategy for the Arabic woman who must otherwise choose between using the discourse of the Other or remaining silent:²⁷

Il [ce récit] résiste à être raconté d'une manière cohérente, définitive, et le silence du récit atone de Zahra arrive à se répercuter plus fort que le récit vocalisé (les voix narratrices) d'Ahmed et des conteurs/euses. Ainsi, le lecteur se voit accorder le privilège d'entrer à la fois dans le lieu sans lieu où le récit silencieux de la femme se situe et où le récit muet de l'écrivain postcolonial, avec toutes ses significations refoulées, s'exprime. (290)

Yet, as attractive as is Erickson's analysis in its ability to bring together Ben Jelloun's circular, multiple narrative(s), male-female power relations in Islamic society, and the sociolinguistic situation of the postcolonial writer, it hinges on the equation of Zahra's (unvoiced) voice with that of the silent Arabic woman. Extending his argument from the first paragraph of *L'Enfant de sable*, Erickson contends that Zahra offers a model to the Arabic woman for liberation from the fixating male gaze and the dominating forces of Islam:

Zahra résiste à être déterminée et située par le regard de l'homme, par la dialectique du pouvoir islamique. Le premier paragraphe décrit comment, ayant renoncé à la persona mâle, elle avait renoncé aussi à 'la place du père' (10) et menait maintenant une existence solitaire dans l'obscurité de sa chambre...parce que la lumière la menaçait: 'elle le [Ahmed; lisons 'la'] dénudait, pénétrait sous sa peau et y décelait la honte et les larmes secrètes. Il la sentait passer sur son corps comme une flamme qui brûlerait ses masques, une lame qui lui retirerait lentement le voile de chair qui maintenait entre lui et les autres la distance nécessaire'. (291, brackets original)

Erickson's gloss of "le"—"Ahmed; lisons 'la'" aligns this passage with his claim that Zahra opens a path for a female resistance; however, his decision to read the masculine pronoun as feminine is his own. The opening narrator ("*voix narratrice*") of the novel clearly describes (the yet unnamed) Ahmed as a male, a male with a secret that shames him, a male who wears masks, and whose flesh veils his identity and creates a distance between him and others. Erickson's analysis simplifies Ahmed's complex male-female hybridism. Choosing to interpret, in opposition to the narratorial voice, the isolated and liberated male character of the opening pages of the novel as the unvoiced narrative voice of Zahra, Erickson here overlooks Ahmed-Zahra's double nature. Throughout the novel, however, Ahmed functions to a greater or lesser degree and with more or less anxiety and tension as both male and female.

At the same time that Erickson's analysis reduces Ahmed's hybrid identity to the singular, unvoiced female voice of Zahra, he also has a tendency to confuse the narrator's opinions with those of the author, or to speculate as to the author's personal opinions. Erickson wonders, for example, to what extent Ben Jelloun himself identifies with the position of Lalla Zahra, the voiceless Arabic woman: "La sexualité de la femme, sans laquelle il n'y aurait pas d'histoire, est peut-être le terme primordial générateur dans *L'Enfant de sable*. La question s'impose de savoir jusqu'à quel degré l'auteur, en se positionnant dans le lieu sans lieu de la femme arabe, s'approprie lui-même son espace, sa voix silencieuse" (296). Erickson even admits that he is unable to answer this question ("Une réponse définitive est impossible" [296]), yet he continues his attempt to draw a connection between the two, noting that Ben Jelloun's narrative is marked by exceptional understanding: "Cependant, a mesure qu'il devient un écrivain postcolonial qui s'est lui aussi heurté aux barrières du colonialisme, son acte d'appropriation se marque par une profonde sympathie. Il partage avec la femme arabe le contexte [le] plus large de la connaissance postcoloniale" (296). Thus, according to Erickson's analysis, the character of Ahmed-Zahra would be a specific, politically motivated hybrid rather than an indeterminate one: a fusion of masculine, oppressive, colonial culture and of the submissive Arabic woman, whose position parallels that of the postcolonial writer. Although I read Ahmed-Zahra's hybridism differently, Erickson's support for his reading of the specificity of Ahmed-Zahra's hybrid character is persuasive. It could stand alone, regardless of Ben Jelloun's subjective identification.

A number of scholars have seen in the nonlinear and opened narrative of *L'Enfant de sable* a description of or commentary on the tension and conflict between the Moroccan culture of Ben Jelloun's birth and the French culture of his adoption. Marc

Gontard identifies the breakdown of linear narrative in the novel as a clash between traditional, oral (Arabic) culture and postmodern, scientific (European) culture:

La dérégulation du système narratif traduit un phénomène de métissage entre une société traditionnelle dans laquelle le récit est, par excellence, la forme du savoir et la société post-moderne dont le savoir est de type scientifique (je renvoie à Lyotard en ce qui concerne cette opposition).

En effet, dans la société traditionnelle, il existe une pragmatique du récit dont le protocole est un gage de la cohésion sociale. Dans *L'Enfant de sable*, le narrateur garant de l'ordre du récit est le conteur populaire de la place Jemâa el Fna à Marrakech, conteur qui tire sa légitimité de la *halqa* (le cercle des auditeurs) que seule sa performance narrative face au public lui permet de constituer. Or ce conteur va perdre peu à peu le contrôle de son récit. (66)

For Gontard, then, the narrator's loss of control and the ensuing lack of narrative closure²⁸ results from and recreates the tension of *mestizo* culture. Gontard notes that the *mestizo* subject's position is one of marked tension: "Le Moi bilingue est un lieu de tension particulièrement actif entre la culture d'origine (le Maroc) et la culture d'adoption (française et plus généralement occidentale), qui est la culture métissante" (65). Moreover, Gontard situates this weak social system and loss of certainty within the tradition of postmodernism:

Or ce qui travaille aujourd'hui la littérature occidentale, dans ses meilleures productions, c'est ce tremblement ontologique lié au développement de la science post-moderne dont la réflexion, en se déplaçant vers les phénomènes instables (des 'objets fractals' de Mandelbrot à la 'théorie des catastrophes' de René Thom) détruit les certitudes élaborées par la cybernétique. Cette mutation qui place au premier plan les dérégulations et le désordre, tandis que la théorie générale des systèmes produisait au contraire de l'ordre, s'accompagne, selon les analyses de J.-F. Lyotard, d'un affaiblissement du lien social, phénomène dont on trouve un retentissement particulièrement évident dans deux romans récents de Ben Jelloun: *L'Enfant de sable* et *La Nuit sacrée*. (65)

Gontard's association of the unpredictability and uncertainty of postmodernism with narrative indeterminacy returns the discussion of narrative openness and ambiguity, common to both the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, to an interrogation of the relationship between narrative and the larger foundations of meaning. Whereas *L'Enfant de sable* exploits physical and narrative ambiguity violently and radically, the *Roman de Silence*'s more subtle descriptions and enactments similarly stage a tension between determinate and indeterminate meaning. As both works question the possibility of fixed identity, they call into question the notion of a single absolute Truth. Even while suggesting that the "truth" of Silence's and Ahmed's sex-gender identity is necessarily contextualized—that which passes for true—each text holds onto the potential for an

ultimate, physical Truth. In the concluding segments of the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, through scenes featuring the physical “unveiling” of Silence and Ahmed, these two narratives both explore the possibility of a final truth as residing in the body.

CHAPTER 4

The Ultimate Challenge to the Primacy of the Sexed Body

THE UNVEILING

In the concluding episode of the *Roman de Silence*, King Ebain discovers Silence's true nature—"her" female physicality—after Silence captures Merlin the wizard who has been living as a wild man in the woods. The king had sent Silence to find Merlin under the pretense of requiring Merlin's insight to decipher a troubling dream vision. Merlin himself had prophesied that only a woman would be able to capture him (5803), yet King Ebain instructs Silence not to return to court without Merlin. In truth, the king had no real need of Merlin, and sent Silence on this seemingly impossible mission to banish "him" following Queen Eufeme's (fabricated) complaint that Silence had tried again to rape her. After wandering in the woods for almost half a year, Silence encounters a mysterious white-haired man¹ who tells Silence of Merlin's ways and teaches Silence how to trick him with meat, honey, milk and wine.

Nature and Nurture wage one final battle over Merlin, wherein each claims to have more power over Merlin than the other. Nurture argues that Merlin should by now be more beast than man: he has been living in the wilderness for so long that he should have put human nature behind him and crave only herbs to eat, rather than cooked meat (6002–6). In response, Nature argues that Nurture has more of a negative effect on human behavior than a salutary one. Human evil derives from Nurture rather than Nature, Nature maintains, using the story of Adam's fall to defend her claim: Adam's sin must have occurred because of the Devil's teachings, that is, because of Nurture, since God made Man in His image and "Dex ne fist ainc male choze" (6065). Nurture accepts this reasoning, admits defeat to Nature, and departs (6088–89).

Silence follows the instructions of the mysterious white-haired man and successfully entraps Merlin (6090–6136): Silence lures him first with well-salted, cooked meat (which appeals to Merlin's human side), then supplies him with honey (which he drinks readily because of the salt in the meat), then provides him with milk (which makes him still thirstier and which causes him to swell up), and then gives him wine (which makes him become very confused and fall asleep). Once Silence has seized Merlin, he/she leads the wizard back to King Ebain's court.

The news of Merlin's capture precedes their arrival and King Ebain is, of course, surprised and confused to hear it (6177–79). As a masculine-gendered figure, Silence has

successfully completed a task that by definition had to be a feminine performance. Silence thus enters the “domain of abject beings” (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 3)—the culturally unimaginable or unthinkable in their resistance to traditional gender categorization.² Upon their arrival in court, and after an initial period of mysterious silence and laughter, Merlin reveals Silence’s hidden identity to King Ebain and moreover tells the king that his wife, Queen Eufeme, has been having an affair with a man who cross-dresses as a nun. To reintegrate Silence into the domain of the culturally “thinkable,” the gender binary, King Ebain commands Silence to undress before the court. He orders the nun to undress also:

Li rois en est encor en dolte.
 Fait Merlin fermement tenir
 Et dont a fait avant venir
 La nonain, sil fait despollier,...
 Et Silence despollier roeve.
 Tost si com Merlins dist les trueve.
 Tolt issi l’a trové par tolt. (6568–74)

Seeing Silence’s body, the king declares in a straightforward manner: “Nos veöns bien que tu iés feme” (6586). He asks Silence for an explanation of “her” behavior. Once Silence has told his/her story, King Ebain reinstates female inheritance in his kingdom. He promptly orders the nun executed and the queen drawn and quartered, and himself marries Silence. The king’s marriage to Silence functions to clarify any residual sexual ambiguity. As McCracken writes of the final resolution of appearance and identity that is typical of medieval transvestite romances: “The anxiety provoked by the transvestite heroine must be contained in these romances through a restoration of ‘proper’ channels of reproduction and succession” (517). Silence’s unveiling reinstates “her” body as the locus of identity. Once Silence’s true nature has been revealed, “her” gendered performance becomes realigned with “her” sex through “her” wedding to King Ebain. Although the outcome is less straightforward, we will later see that Ahmed also undergoes an “unveiling” in *L’Enfant de sable* which, as in the *Roman de Silence*, challenges the cross-dressed hero(ine)’s (mis)alignment of sex and gender.

The narrator makes Silence’s transition to a feminine gender seem strikingly uncomplicated and quick—a simple matter of dressing “her” as a woman and exchanging the masculine suffix *-us* on her name for the feminine *-a*:

Silence atorment come feme.
 Segnor, que vos diroie plus?
 Ains ot a non Scilensiüs:
 Ostés et -us, mis i est -a,
 Si est només Scilentia. (6664–6668)

Numerous commentators of the *Roman de Silence* have read in this renaming and Silence's ultimate assumption of a feminine gender, the victory of the "natural" body over culture, and a return to order and conventionality that resolves the chaos and ambiguity caused by Silence's indeterminately gendered status. Kinoshita stresses Nature's victory over Nurture: "The text recontains the subversity it unleashes. Silence does not challenge socially constructed definitions of gender; she exploits them. In the end, Nature proves right and Nurture wrong, thanks to Merlin's (un)timely intervention: biological 'truth' will out" (402). Cooper also emphasizes Nature's triumph and the return of propriety: "Nature is appeased, for what the allegorical figure deems to be Silence's naturally proper name, along with her naturally proper sexuality, is now restored" (359). Blumreich, who reads the *Roman de Silence* as "a primer on the distinction between natural and unnatural human sexuality" (47), in which Eufemie represents the heterosexual norms of thirteenth-century society and Eufeme manifests "sexual perversion in the form of covert lesbianism" (48), focuses on the ultimate death of Eufeme rather than the marriage of Silence to the king, but arrives at the same conclusion: order has been restored. "Divine and secular justice prevail, and the *Roman de Silence* ends with celebration" (Blumreich 59).

Brahney, who underscores throughout her study Silence's success as a man and the potential power of women, also finds in the ending a return to proper order and convention: "Within the context of the romance—setting twentieth-century feminist considerations aside for the moment—this divestiture is a positive turn of events, representing a restoration of order, balance, and justice" (60). Brahney makes a special point to contrast "a twentieth-century feminist perspective," which would view this ending as a disappointment and a defeat, with a medieval point of view, which would regard Silence's coronation as the highest possible honor:

While we, from a twentieth-century feminist perspective, might regard this as a defeat for the person Silence has shown herself to be, in terms of the romance it is a victory. Silence has shown herself to be valiant, worthy, and honest and is rewarded with the highest status a woman could attain—she becomes queen. Her triumph is also a gain for other women as well since, because of his admiration for Silence, Ebain restores to all women the right to inherit. What troubles feminists is to see Silence disappear into the role of queen, wed to a king who is clearly not, from our perspective, worthy of her. As Ebain himself says,...'Silence,.../Miols valt certes ta loialtés/Que ne face ma roialtés' (6630–2), and we cannot help but agree. (60)

Stock, too, comments on the "disappointing" aspect of the ending: "The improbably tidy, artificial felicity of the conclusion of the *Roman de Silence* disappoints after the strong feminist themes in the rest of the work" (27). And Waters contrasts the traditionalist ending of the *Roman de Silence* with a more desirable feminist conclusion: "The *Roman de Silence* manages, despite its apparent subversive qualities, to reiterate hegemonic norms. Men are still *preux* and *vaillant*, women are roses and lilies.... The feminist reader longs to see Silence value her own pleasure and volition. But the romance points toward both complicity in and subversion of the status quo" (45). Perret identifies a

similar return to tradition as characteristic of all of the medieval texts involving female transvestism: “Le scénario du travestissement, qui libère la femme des contraintes de son sexe, se termine dans une impasse, comme si ces textes exploraient les possibilités de rôles sexuels différents et le problème de l’identité sexuelle et sociale de la femme, pour finir par renforcer le *status quo*” (329).

In *L’Enfant de sable* we find no ultimate reembellishment by Nature or sudden transformation into a female body and feminine gender. Rather, Ahmed continues to experience his/her identity in a conflictual and painful manner. Ahmed begins to resent Fatima, his/her wife, because Fatima reveals herself to be stronger than he/she, in spite of (or because of) her physical disabilities. She starts to pull Ahmed down with her into her deep emotional despair and hopelessness. Ahmed perceives his/her marriage to Fatima—which would have been the ultimate validation of “his” successful male performance—as a failure and he/she longs to be rid of her:

Je voulais me débarrasser de Fatima sans lui faire de mal. Je l’installai dans une chambre éloignée de la mienne et me mis lentement à la haïr. Je venais d’échouer dans le processus que j’avais préparé et déclenché. Cette femme, parce que handicapée, s’était révélée plus forte, plus dure et plus rigoureuse que tout ce que j’avais prévu. Voulant l’utiliser pour parfaire mon apparence sociale, ce fut elle qui sut le mieux m’utiliser et faillit m’entraîner dans son profond désespoir. (79)

Eventually, Fatima gives up her will to live and deteriorates even more rapidly: “Elle ne prenait plus ses médicaments, mangeait peu, ne parlait presque plus. Elle voulait mourir et m’emmener avec elle dans sa chute” (79). It troubles Ahmed that Fatima wants to take him/her down with her, but he/she reacts even more strongly when Fatima dares to touch his/her pubic region, which Ahmed had kept carefully concealed from her throughout their marriage: “Elle se glissa dans mon lit pendant que je dormais et doucement se mit à caresser mon bas-ventre. Je fus réveillé en sursaut et la repoussai violemment. J’étais furieux. Elle sourit pour la première fois, mais ce sourire ne me rassura point. Je ne la supportais pas. Je désirais sa mort” (80).

Shortly before her death, Fatima comes to Ahmed in the evening and tells him/her that she has always known Ahmed’s secret and that it is this condition that drew her to Ahmed and that unites the two of them:

J’ai toujours su qui tu es, c’est pour cela, ma soeur, ma cousine, que je suis venue mourir ici, près de toi. Nous sommes toutes les deux nées penchées sur la pierre au fond du puits sec, sur une terre stérile, entourées de regards sans amour. Nous sommes femmes avant d’être infirmes, ou peut-être nous sommes infirmes parce que femmes..., je sais notre blessure... Elle est commune. (80, ellipses original)

Certainly, Fatima’s observations of the sterility and lovelessness of their common “sisterhood” are accurate. Additionally, for both “women,” their femininity is a kind of infirmity³ and wound. Bargenda refers to Ahmed and Fatima as “[des] êtres totalement marginalisés” (23). Cazenave states that Ahmed and Fatima are “both sick”: “one due to

natural biological causes, the other due to his/her own choice" (440). And Déjeux underscores the violence of "dépossession," common to Ahmed and Fatima, and which constitutes a theme throughout the novels of Ben Jelloun (273): "La blessure au point de départ est une violence faite à l'identité. Les personnages des romans sont mal dans leur peau et leur être profond. Ils se dédoublent et portent des masques. Le domaine de la sexualité est particulièrement atteint" (274). In Ahmed's choice of Fatima as "his" wife, he/she has selected a person who, like Ahmed, is in many ways dissociated from her female physicality and sexuality (and thus, undoubtedly, from Ahmed's point of view, a "safe" spouse). Fatima's comments make clear that she too has been aware of their shared physical alienation and concomitant social estrangement.

At the same time, Fatima's comparison of herself to Ahmed also highlights the monstrosity of both of these characters. Both Fatima and Ahmed are, to an extent, grotesque and *unnatural*—Fatima because of her disfigurements and disabilities, and Ahmed because of his/her hybridism. In the *Roman de Silence* also, the association of Merlin and Silence similarly emphasizes the monstrous aspect of these two hybrids: Merlin, wizard and wild man—part man and part beast—and Silence, cross-dressed hero(ine). In both texts, while clearly aberrant and somewhat disturbing, these monsters also testify to the considerable power and attraction of the mysterious, indeterminate Other and to their ability to engage with and challenge traditional thinking. I will return again to this notion at a later point, in my concluding chapter.

Following Fatima's death, Ahmed loses control of his/her financial and professional life. Fatima's family suspects that Ahmed "precipitated" her death, and their two families become enemies "pour toujours" (93). Isolated and alone, Ahmed begins to consider a new existence. Significantly, it is his/her sense of alienation from his/her sexuality that drives these thoughts:

Depuis que je suis retire dans cette chambre, je ne cesse d'avancer sur les sables d'un desert où je ne vois pas d'issue, où l'horizon est a la rigueur une ligne bleue, toujours mobile, et je rêve de traverser cette ligne bleue pour marcher dans une steppe sans but, sans penser a ce qui pourrait advenir... Je marche pour me dépouiller, pour me laver, pour me débarrasser d'une question qui me hante et dont je ne parle jamais: le désir. Je suis las de porter en mon corps ses insinuations sans pouvoir ni les repousser ni les faire miennes. Je resterai profondément inconsolé, avec un visage qui n'est pas le mien, et un désir que je ne peux nommer. (88, ellipses original)

Ahmed's association of his/her unknown desire with an endless sandy desert—indistinct in form and ever-shifting—and with an unfixed horizon that could lead to an aimless trek depicts eloquently his/her confusion and disorientation as he/she strives to begin to "own" this nameless desire. Although weary of experiencing his/her desire as merely a nebulous insinuation, Ahmed identifies no easy consolation or relief.

Writing to his/her anonymous correspondent, Ahmed expresses his/her frustration with his/her gendered "experiment of one" and criticizes and rejects the traditional family structure with its strict sexual hierarchy and gender roles:

La grande, l'immense épreuve que je vis n'a de sens qu'en dehors de ces petits schémas psychologiques qui prétendent savoir et expliquer pourquoi une femme est une femme et un homme est un homme. Sachez, ami, que la famille, telle qu'elle existe dans nos pays, avec le père tout-puissant et les femmes réléguées à la domesticité avec une parcelle d'autorité que leur laisse le mâle, la famille, je la répudis, je l'enveloppe de brume et ne la reconnais plus. (89)

But whereas Ahmed declares his/her abhorrence of this family structure, he/she continues to dominate his/her own household, even from the distance of his/her seclusion: "Ahmed régnait même absent et invisible. On sentait sa présence dans la maison et on la redoutait" (89).

Nonetheless, Ahmed repeatedly indicates that he/she longs for a significant alteration in his/her personal life, although he/she remains uncertain as to what his/her new identity should be and how he/she could achieve a more authentic expression:

J'ai perdu la langue de mon corps; d'ailleurs je ne l'ai jamais possédée. Je devrais l'apprendre et commencer d'abord par parler comme une femme. Comme une femme? Pourquoi? Suis-je un homme? Il va falloir un long chemin, retourner sur mes pas, patiemment, retrouver les premières sensations du corps que ni la tête ni la raison ne contrôlent. Comment parler? Et à qui parlerai-je? (96)

Ahmed thus desires to discover a "language of the body" that would arise directly from his/her body, unmediated by intellect or reason. Presumably, this pure language form resides deep within, in Ahmed's true nature, under the mask of his/her masculine gender performance.

Ahmed privately leaves off his/her male performance bit by bit. He/she begins to look at his/her body in the mirror⁴ and decides to "return" to a female existence: "J'apprends à me regarder dans le miroir. J'apprends à voir mon corps, habillé d'abord, nu ensuite. Je suis un peu maigre. Mes seins sont tellement petits... Seules mes fesses ont quelque chose de féminin... J'ai décidé de m'épiler les jambes et de trouver les mots du retour" (98, ellipses original). Although Ahmed states that he/she feels ready ("disponible") to be a woman, he/she admits to being overwhelmed by the immensity of the project. Ahmed's continued use of masculine adjectives indicates that a female identity remains a liberating prospect for the future, rather than his/her self-description in the moment: "Depuis quelque temps je me sens libéré, oui, disponible pour être femme. Mais on me dit, je me dis, qu'avant il va falloir remonter à l'enfance, être petite fille, adolescente, jeune fille amoureuse, femme..., que de chemin..., je n'y arriverai jamais" (98, my emphasis; ellipses original). Nevertheless, as difficult as it is, Ahmed adds that he/she finds the exploration into his/her inner self extraordinarily fulfilling: "Mais je m'entends crier au fond de moi-même. Chaque cri est une descente en moi-même. Une descente, pas une chute. C'est presque une euphorie. Pouvoir crier et s'entendre... Glisser entièrement en soi, à l'intérieur de cette carcasse" (100, ellipses original). Ahmed thus associates the exploration of a female identity with a "return" to an inner and more authentic existence. In spite of Ahmed's ongoing confusion and difficulty, the euphoria that he/she

experiences would seem again as in the *Roman de Silence* to indicate a “victory” for Nature.

Ahmed stops binding his/her chest and begins to give expression to sexual desires and fantasies. He/she writes in one journal entry of vague dreams of indistinct bodies of indefinite sexes: “Des corps viennent habiter certains de mes rêves: ils me touchent, me caressent et s’en vont. Tout se passe dans les secrets du sommeil.... Je ne distingue jamais les visages. Corps d’homme? Corps de femme? Ma tête ne retient que des images confuses” (101). In another entry, Ahmed relates a particularly powerful dream in which he/she imagines him/herself with a man and is so overcome by the experience that he/she loses consciousness (95–96).

On the day when Ahmed encounters Oum Abbas, *la vieille*, who leads him/her to the traveling circus where Ahmed assumes the role of the drag queen, Lalla Zahra, Ahmed undergoes an “unveiling” that recalls the king’s forceful examination of Silence’s body. Oum Abbas corners Ahmed in a dark and narrow alley and palpates his/her body underneath his/her robe:

Elle me coinça contre le mur et se mit à me fouiller. Je compris vite qu’elle ne cherchaient ni argent ni bijoux. Ses mains tâtaient mon corps comme pour vérifier une intuition. Ma poitrine minuscule ne la rassura point, elle glissa sa main dans mon séroul et la laissa un instant sur mon bas-ventre, puis introduisit son médium dans mon vagin. J’eus très mal. Je poussai un cri qu’elle étouffa en mettant l’autre main sur ma bouche, puis me dit:

-J’avais un doute.

-Moi aussi! dis-je entre les lèvres. (118)

Whereas Oum Abbas’s “verification” of Ahmed’s sex seems to appease any doubts she had concerning his/her true identity, her casting of Ahmed as Lalla Zahra nevertheless underscores her recognition of Ahmed’s ambiguous state and performative potential. Unlike King Ebain’s declaration (“Nos veõns bien que tu iés feme”[6586]) which effectively locks Silence into a single gender role, Oum Abbas’s “J’avais un doute” acknowledges Ahmed’s lack of gender specificity.

At the same time, however, Ahmed him/herself again and again portrays his/her “return” to a feminine gendered identity as closer to “her” original state and, thus, more authentic. When Ahmed prepares to leave the seclusion of his/her room for the first time after Fatima’s death, he/she emphasizes the happiness that the prospect of this return to self inspires: “Il est temps de naître de nouveau. En fait je ne vais pas changer mais simplement revenir à moi.... Mon corps soulèverait les pierres lourdes de ce destin et se poserait comme une chose neuve sur le sol. Ah! L’idée de me soustraire à cette mémoire me donne de la joie” (111). Ahmed underscores yet again his/her contentment and feeling of lightness and freedom in the immediately following lines: “J’avais oublié la joie! Quel soulagement, quel plaisir!... J’ai mis du temps pour arriver jusqu’à cette fenêtre! Je me sens léger. Vais-je crier de joie ou chanter?” (111–12).

Thus, in contrast to the *Roman de Silence* in which King Ebain’s pronouncement upon viewing Silence’s naked body admits no sexual indeterminacy, and Silence him/herself never responds personally or emotionally to the changes taking place in “her” gendered

identity, in *L'Enfant de sable* Oum Abbas's casting of Ahmed as Lalla Zahra highlights Ahmed's generic ambiguity, while Ahmed's subjective reaction throughout this episode repeatedly tells of his/her joy and sense of liberation as he/she "returns" to a feminine gender. Unlike Ahmed's masculine gender which he/she now characterizes as externally imposed ("le destin qu'on m'avait fabriqué" [111]) and burdensome ("les pierres lourdes de ce destin" [111])—a deceptive performance undertaken out of necessity—a feminine gendered identity in its alignment with Ahmed's original, biological sex offers the promise of a more genuine and "natural" existence. Cazenave has stated, when the adolescent Ahmed experienced his/her first menses, that "some biological facts seem to be undeniable, and one would expect nature to win" (439). It now seems that "she" has.

In both the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, then, through the physical "unveiling" of the cross-dressed hero(ine)s to King Ebain, his court and Merlin and to the powerful and mysterious Oum Abbas, Silence and Ahmed seem to be revealed as anatomically female. This revelation leads, in turn, to the assumption of a parallel feminine gendered identity—traditional and within the norms of medieval nobility and succession for Silence, and framed, for Ahmed, by the performance of Lalla Zahra. Whereas both Silence and Ahmed have successfully sustained masculine gendered performances, the uncovering of their female sexed bodies supersedes this performance. Nature and the natural body appear victorious.

Each of these scenes depicts a dramatic representation of the sex-gender, nature-culture split. The narrators describe Silence's and Ahmed's female sex as visible or discernible and, since a change in gender identity follows for both heroines from this discovery, an initial reading can lead to the conviction that gender identity does indeed reside in the body. But whereas Silence's and Ahmed's assumption of a feminine gendered identity is the most immediately apparent result of these unveiling scenes—a change that would certainly seem to indicate the primacy of the body and of biological sex in the construction of identity—in a number of ways Nurture also makes "her" presence known in this transformation.

THE CULTURAL CREATION OF GENDER

In both the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, neither Silence nor Ahmed announces his/her own sex to his/her respective audiences. As I have just noted, following Oum Abbas's digital verification of Ahmed's sex in *L'Enfant de sable*, his/her response to Oum Abbas's "j'avais un doute," is a noncommittal "Moi aussi!" (118). In the *Roman de Silence*, once Silence has recounted his/her reasons for this cross-dressed performance, he/she states simply, "Do with me as you choose": "Faites de moi vostre plaisir" (6628) and, after praising King Ebain for his reinstatement of female inheritance,⁵ does not speak again. Silence makes no indication of whether he/she concurs with King Ebain's pronouncement or whether he/she is in agreement concerning "her" marriage to the king. In the absence of Silence's own perspective or voice, King Ebain's declaration, "Nos veõs bien que tu iés feme," carries the weight of a command as much as a description. Gilmore notes that "stripping Silentius before the whole court renders that body a visual object subject to male authority" (123 n. 29). The king's reading of Silence's body now replaces Cador's initial cross-dressed strategy for retaining his

holdings as the directive that determines Silence's gendered performance. In both instances, the patriarchal system operates forcefully to determine what constitutes the appropriate gender: the "Law of the Father" continues to frame Silence's gendered performance. Allen adds that Silence's "reversion to femininity...means a submission to the king's power—this time not legislative but sexual. King and parents exercise the power of the masters, the Cratylistic power to endow people with names, and to determine their destiny by speech" (107). Even as Nature "reclaims" Silence as her nurseling, it is still ultimately sociocultural forces that orchestrate this change.

Silence assumes a feminine gender, then, in the concluding passages of the *Roman de Silence*, not because of any failure on his/her part to maintain a convincing masculine performance, but because of the restrictions imposed on Silence by his/her culture. In this sense it is Nurture or culture at large that finally determines Silence's sex and gender identity. A biological female, performing as a male, Silence has achieved tremendous accomplishments in the male sphere. Certainly, Silence's physicality, "her" biological nature, has not limited him/her. Once King Ebain discovers Silence's female body, however, he is unable to allow him/her to continue his/her hybrid existence. Whereas the audience and reader of the *Roman de Silence* have long been aware of Silence's hybridism and have seen the power that this indeterminacy has brought to him/her, King Ebain, as representative of the dominant culture, requires a traditional sex-gender alignment. The reader's vantage point reveals the limitations and narrow perspective of the dominant culture in its insistence on a binary gender division. It is clearly in the interest of the society to maintain the status quo, even while the attractions and tensions of sexual-generic indeterminacy and ambiguity have been given free play within the romance.

Many of the scholars who find the conclusion to the *Roman de Silence* "disappointing" read Silence's assumption of a feminine gender as a blow to feminism or to the potential for female achievement and success. I do not share this perspective. First, Silence's "return" to a feminine gender does not negate "her" considerable accomplishments as a male.⁶ Of equal importance, the ending of the romance says more about dominant culture's resistance to generic blurring and ambiguity than it does about the ultimate power of the biological female within the medieval world. Furthermore, I do not agree, as states McCracken, that in Silence's ultimate realignment of gender and sex, the previous ambiguity of the text is "eliminated" (521).⁷ In her analysis, McCracken overlooks, as have virtually all of the other scholars writing on the *Roman de Silence*, the crucial and ineluctable perspective of the reader. In her effort to establish that medieval literary transvestite characters do not cross-dress as a means of expressing sexual orientation or personal identity through an "alternate gender," McCracken rejects the power of the cross-dresser to blur gender categories:

Stories about cross-dressing may question the location of gender identity, but they do not blur gender categories. In the aristocratic society of medieval romances characters who dress as men are perceived to be men, characters in women's dress are taken for women. Gender may be hidden by disguise, but the disguise itself is not recognized as an expression of ambiguous gender or as a performance of an alternate gender that blurs or plays on the binary division of male/female. (520)

Whereas McCracken is correct to note that within the medieval romance, characters who dress as men are perceived by the other characters within the romance as men, and those who dress as women are taken for women, she mistakenly extends that analysis to a larger reading of the effect of the cross-dresser in medieval romances, concluding more generally that in these stories, cross-dressers “do not blur gender categories” and do not obscure or play on the binary division of male/female (520). The reader or medieval audience, however, has always seen Silence (and Ahmed) as both female and male—both labeled at birth as anatomically female and constructed performatively as male throughout their young lives. The reader or audience, medieval as well as modern, has seen that Silence and Ahmed *do* play on and blur the traditional binary division of male/female. Moreover, this gender play has a decidedly feminist component as Silence’s and Ahmed’s female physicality or nature does not limit their accomplishments or successes in typically male pursuits, and even adds to their power. Again, the fact that Silence is forced to assume a feminine gender and marry the king at the close of the *Roman de Silence* underscores how threatening this ambiguous hybridism was within that culture, but it does not “eliminate” that textual and sexual ambiguity or erase the realization of sexual/generic indeterminacy throughout the romance. Tying a bow around an ambiguous or chaotic package offers a sense of containment and order to the outside world, but it does not disambiguate the chaos within.

The portrayal of women characters in *L’Enfant de sable* and in the *Roman de Silence* also signals the power of Nurture (or culture) in the creation of gender roles. In *L’Enfant de sable*, even as Ahmed assumes the role of Lalla Zahra and explores “her” own female side, the contrasting female images that Ahmed provides through his/her descriptions of his/her mother and of Oum Abbas repudiate the notion of a shared, universal female nature that would arise directly from their sex. Of Ahmed’s mother, whom he/she sees in nightmare visions, Ahmed gives a disturbing description of long-suffering solitude, isolation and lovelessness:

Elle me regarde et me fige sur place. Je crois que ses lèvres bougent mais aucun son n’en sort.... La voix du mari, cela fait longtemps qu’elle ne l’entend plus. Elle avait bouché ses oreilles avec de la cire brûlante, elle avait souffert mais préférait le silence définitif à cette voix sans âme, sans indulgence, sans pitié.... Défigurée, elle avait renoncé à tout. Comme elle ne savait ni lire ni écrire, elle passait son temps enfermée dans une chambre noire où elle murmurait des choses incompréhensibles. Ses filles l’avaient abandonnée. Moi, je l’avais ignorée. (130–31)

The passive and resigned victim of her brutal and authoritarian husband, she found self-mutilation a more viable option than leaving this miserable marriage and seeking a better existence elsewhere. Continuing his/her description, Ahmed refers to her as a victim and a martyr: “le victime d’une vie qu’elle n’a pu vivre, le martyr d’une époque qui l’a humiliée, blessée et simplement niée” (131).

In opposition to the passivity and hopelessness of Ahmed’s mother, he/she portrays Oum Abbas as bold, dominating and intimidating:

Il est des femmes dans ce pays qui enjambent tous les ordres, dominant, commandent, guident, piétinent: la vieille Oum Abbas. Les hommes la redoutent et pas seulement son fils. Elle prétend avoir eu deux maris simultanément; elle m'a montré un jour deux actes de mariage où ne figure pas le divorce. Chose rare et étrange, mais quand on la connaît un peu cela ne paraît étonnant. (131–32)

Oum Abbas lives outside of conventional society both physically, in that her circus sets up its tents on the outskirts of towns, and socio-legally, in her disregard for the sanctions that prohibit a woman from taking two husbands, yet she is not limited in any way by her “female nature.”

Similarly, in the *Roman de Silence*, the opposing female figures of Silence's mother, Eufemie, and King Ebain's wife, Queen Eufeme⁸ present two extremes in the spectrum of female behavior. As Stock notes, “through their homonymic names, Eufeme and Eufemie initially seem set up as doubles” (20). However, Eufemie, whom the narrator describes as unequalled in loveliness (“N’a feme el regne qui le valle./Li cuens n’avoit enfant que li:/Tols ses païs en abeli,/Qu’el mont n’avoit plus bele mie” [398–401]), is an educated and highly skilled physician (403; 594)⁹ and marries Cadore, King Ebain's nephew, after the two of them fall deeply in love with one another. Eufeme, on the other hand, is a distinctly antipathetic character: “She embodies all the negative stereotypes traditionally associated with her sex,” Roche-Mahdi states. “She is lustful, scheming, disloyal, and vengeful; she speaks only to deceive” (xx). Moreover, Eufeme's marriage to Ebain is loveless and barren; she is merely a “chattel of war,”¹⁰ Ebain's prize following the end of his war with Eufeme's father, Beghe, King of Norway. Once married, Eufemie forms a quiet partnership with Cadore; Eufeme, in contrast, attempts to seduce Ebain's vassal, Silence, falsifies letters, and conducts at least one illicit relationship. In the *Roman de Silence* as in *L'Enfant de sable*, the opposing principal female figures of Eufemie and Eufeme, Ahmed's (nameless) mother and Oum Abbas, combine with Silence's and Ahmed's performative masculine gender to expose the fallacy of the “biology-is-destiny formulation” (*Gender Trouble* 6) and to refute the concept of a pandemic female nature. Additionally, the primacy and stability of Silence's and Ahmed's sexed bodies, which initially seemed fairly clearcut when King Ebain and Oum Abbas inspected them, become, on closer examination considerably more problematic.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A BODY CONSTRUCTED BY PERFORMANCE

As I noted previously, the *Roman de Silence* makes Silence's transition to the feminine gender and resumption of her “true” female nature seem an easy and straightforward process, involving nothing more than a change of clothes and a minor alteration in his/her name. However, the narrator also states that it took Nature three days to “reembellish” Silence's body after she (Nature) had resumed possession of Silence:

D’illuec al tierc ior que Nature

Ot recovree sa droiture
 Si prist Nature a repolir
 Par tolt le cors et a tolir
 Tolt quanque ot sor le cors de malle. (6669–6673)

If three days elapsed before Nature removed the masculine features from Silence's body, one has to wonder just what King Ebain and his court saw when Silence undressed before them.¹¹ The narrator specifies that Nature repaired Silence's weathered skin—"Ainc n'i lassa ne point de halle:/ Remariä lués ensomis/Assisement le roze al lis" (6674–76)—but does not mention what aspects of Silence's *whole body* ("tolt le cors" [6672]) needed altering. What were the masculine features that Nature needed to remove? Stock refers to Silence as "a virtual transsexual" who undergoes "her transformation into a female by the 'operation' of Nature" (27). However, the narrator's reference to Silence's masculine physicality suggests that Nurture, rather than Nature, may have played the central role in the construction of Silence's body, altering Silence's physical features to correspond with the masculine gender that he/she has enacted throughout his/her youth and young adulthood. Rather than embodying the locus of meaning and gender identity, Silence's "true nature," his/her sexed body, may itself be performatively constructed. McCracken states similarly that the displacement of "the primacy of anatomy as the location of gender identity" indicates the possibility of a materiality that changes according to one's gender: "In its contradictory representations of the gendered body of Silence, the romance begins to imagine a body whose features change to correspond to an adopted gender identity: Silence's story suggests that the body's 'nature' may be determined by its 'nurture'" (534). As fantastic as it may seem,¹² the romance proposes that rather than remaining static, the sexed body may itself be constructed by the performance.

In *L'Enfant de sable*, I have already noted that Ahmed's inwardly pointing breasts insinuate a transgression of his/her masculine gender performance into the interior. Following Fatima's death, there are several other instances in which the narrator or Ahmed him/herself notes that Ahmed's gendered performance seems to be altering his/her physical body. Once Ahmed begins to consider assuming a feminine gender, the narrator describes his/her body as undergoing a parallel mutation or transformation:

Il était en train d'espérer un changement radical dans le destin qu'il s'était plus ou moins donné. Pour cela il avait besoin de temps, beaucoup de temps, comme il avait besoin qu'un regard étranger se posât sur son visage et son corps en mutation ou dans le retour vers l'origine, vers les droits de la nature. (90)

It is Ahmed's sense that he/she requires the gaze of an outside person to effect this "return" toward his/her original and natural state that drives him/her eventually to leave the seclusion of his/her room. In a journal entry that Ahmed writes shortly thereafter, as he/she begins to explore a feminine gendered identity, Ahmed notes that his/her voice is changing. Deep and masculine while Ahmed was performing as a male, it is now undergoing a metamorphosis: "Je crois connaître la voix de notre Prophète,

Mohammed.... Voix calme, posée, pure; rien ne la trouble. Je vous parle de la voix parce que la mienne a subi une telle métamorphose qu'en ce moment j'essaie de retrouver son grain naturel. C'est difficile. Je reste silencieux et je crains que ma voix ne se perde, n'aille ailleurs" (100).

Once Ahmed takes on the role of Lalla Zahra, however, there is some confusion as to the specifics of his/her physical features. Following the death of the original storyteller, three members of the audience—Salem, Amar and Fatouma—each offer (conflicting) versions of the conclusion to the tale of Ahmed-Zahra. In Amar's conclusion, he reads passages from Ahmed's journal (which Amar purportedly bought from the nurses at the morgue after the storyteller's death) in which Ahmed notes that his/her appearance is sexually ambiguous: "Je sais, j'ai un corps de femme, même si un léger doute persiste quant à l'apparence de choses" (152). Ahmed goes on to describe his/her physical body and features in some detail. "J'ai de petits seins—des seins réprimés dès l'adolescence—mais une voix d'homme. Ma voix est grave, c'est elle qui me trahit.... J'ai un visage fin mais couvert par une barbe" (152–53). Amar's version thus describes Ahmed-Zahra's male physical features (very small breasts, deep voice, beard) that indicate the power that his/her male performance had on his/her body. Although in Amar's narrative, Ahmed does not mention the corresponding alteration ("return") to female physical features that he/she describes (cited above) in the metamorphosis of his/her voice once he/she adopts a female gender, in this version Ahmed does express his/her desire to be "reborn" with a woman's body: "Je voudrais sortir pour naître de nouveau, naître à vingt-cinq ans, sans parents, sans famille, mais avec un prénom de femme, avec un corps de femme débarrassé à jamais de tous ces mensonges" (153). The particulars of Ahmed's body thus remain somewhat vague, yet Amar's conclusion to Ahmed-Zahra's story definitely points toward an inconstant physicality that mutates to correspond to his/her gender performance.

In Salem's version of the end of Ahmed-Zahra's life, he imagines an even more radical scenario in which Ahmed's body is constructed by his/her performance. According to Salem, Abbas and his mother, *la vieille*, turn on Zahra violently and encage "her" as a circus freak:

Zahra n'était plus 'princesse d'amour'; elle ne dansait plus; elle n'était plus un homme; elle n'était plus une femme, mais une bête de cirque que la vieille exhibait dans une cage. Les mains attachées, la robe déchirée juste au niveau du torse pour donner à voir ses petits seins, Zahra avait perdu l'usage de la parole. Elle pleurait et les larmes coulaient sur son visage où la barbe avait repoussée. Elle était devenue la femme à la barbe qu'on venait voir de tous les coins de la ville. La curiosité des gens n'avait aucune limite ou retenue. (142)

In Salem's tale, Zahra's generic hybridism ("la femme à la barbe") is surpassed by an even more monstrous decent into the animal kingdom. No longer either man or woman, Zahra now becomes a nonverbal beast. The return of his/her beard also intimates a beast-like growth of hair. Salem's narrative thus proposes the eventuality of an interspecial transformation of the body in response to performance and circumstances.

In *L'Enfant de sable*, then, as in the *Roman de Silence*, Ahmed's physical body appears to change according to his/her condition and gender performance. Rather than remaining the factual constant on which gender identity rests, Ahmed's and Silence's materiality varies in response to their gender. The fantastic mutability of the sexed body in these two narratives controverts the notion of biology as the determination of identity and behavior as it repudiates the primacy of sex over gender. The immutability of sex contested, the construct called "sex" now appears as culturally constructed as gender (*Gender Trouble* 7). Noting that the definitions of sex (as natural, anatomical, chromosomal or hormonal), its history and genealogy, and the documents that purport to establish the "facts" of sex, are all themselves "discursively produced by the various scientific discourses in the service of other political and social interests" (*Gender Trouble* 7), Butler states: "Indeed, perhaps it [sex] was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (*Gender Trouble* 7). Of the *Roman de Silence*, Krueger adds: "'Nature' is the justification of how 'culture' constructs women" (117).

THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF SEX

The seemingly miraculous physical transformations that Silence and Ahmed experience are a material corollary to Butler's ideological and conceptual analysis. Butler demonstrates that the notion of a prediscursive sexed body is philosophically naïve for "'the body' [is] itself a construction" (8)—a construction produced through cultural "laws" that seek to establish and maintain causal lines of connection between biological sex, culturally sanctioned gender and heterosexual desire and practice (17). "'Persons' only become intelligible," she notes, "through becoming gendered in conformity with recognized standards of gender intelligibility" (16). The idea that sex is a *substance*, a "metaphysically self-identical being," is achieved, Butler clarifies, through a "performative twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that 'being' a sex or gender is fundamentally impossible" (18–19). Rather, as Foucault's genealogical inquiry into the production of sexuality indicates, "the category of sex, prior to any categorization of sexual difference, is itself constructed through a historically specific mode of *sexuality*" (*Gender Trouble* 23, *italics original*).¹³ That medical and scientific analyses of sexuality differ at times dramatically over history and in various cultures underscores the extent to which the categories of sex are themselves constructed.

In *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, Vern Bullough notes that whereas we can know little about actual sexual activity throughout history, we can discover a great deal about a given culture's opinions and concerns regarding sexuality through an examination of the laws prohibiting certain behaviors, the religious and philosophical teachings that attempt to establish sanctioned activities, and the assumptions of medical and scientific writers of the times (3–4). Bullough also points out that toleration of various kinds of sexual activity is always directly related to the sexual assumptions of the society itself (4). Thus, for example, Western culture in general is founded on a creation myth that depicts the earth as female, "mother earth," and the sky as male, "the heavenly father"—a mythological representation that "has served as the norm for sexual relations with the male on top, the female underneath" (Bullough 4). Bullough adds that this

representation is not constant among cultures: "Some cultures have considered the earth as male and the sky as female, accepting the woman-superior position as normal, whereas others have looked elsewhere for symbols of maleness and femaleness" (4).

For Western medieval culture, certainly the most influential author on sexuality was Aristotle, the fourth-century B.C.E. Greek philosopher, who classified animals into three groups according to their means of reproduction: those that reproduced (1) by sexual means, (2) by asexual means, and (3) by spontaneous generation (Bullough 5).¹⁴ Aristotle's classifications dominated thinking about animal sexuality until the seventeenth century when the Italian, Francesco Redi, injected some doubt by proving that maggots were born from fly eggs rather than generating spontaneously from rotting material (Bullough 6).¹⁵ Redi did not, however, challenge spontaneous generation in general, probably because, as Bullough explains, the religious thinking of the time required such a belief: "According to general Christian teachings, Adam and Eve had lived happily in Paradise before their expulsion, but it was difficult to explain how they could have lived so happily if they had been plagued by tapeworms, roundworms, or other parasites" (6). Only in the nineteenth century, with Louis Pasteur's discovery of the role of minute organisms in the process of fermentation, was the theory of spontaneous generation dismissed.

In terms of human sexuality and reproduction, Aristotle believed that just as in society and social relations at large, the male was dominant and more active, occupying the position of primary responsibility, but that the female did contribute the material necessary for the successful development of the male's semen: "If, then, the male stands for the effective and active, and the female, considered as female, for the passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon" (*Generation of Animals* 729A, 25–34). Although some Greek writers, such as the writer of the Hippocratic work *Generation*, who was a contemporary of Aristotle's, and the second-century medical writer, Galen, did advocate a theory of human reproduction involving two "seeds," one from the male and one from the female, religious beliefs and cultural notions of proper social relations continued to have a great influence on the understanding of scientific "facts."

By the eleventh century, the most accepted view in medieval Europe of human sexuality and reproduction was that proposed by the Arabic medical writer Avicenna, who played a key role in the transmission of Aristotelian ideas to medieval Europe,¹⁶ and who altered Aristotle's theory somewhat, likening the process of human sexual generation to the manufacture of cheese.¹⁷ Avicenna's concept was further elaborated by St. Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century, and then by his pupil, the esteemed medieval scientist theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, who similarly established a parallel between the female's imperfect generative powers and her more general inferiority: "In the arts the inferior art gives a disposition to the matter to which the higher art gives the form...so also the generative power of the female prepares the matter, which is then fashioned by the active power of the male" (Part III, question 32, "De conceptione Christi quod activum principium," iv.).

Human sperm were first observed in the late seventeenth century by the Dutch scientist, Anton van Leeuwenhoek, who termed these "eel-like" *animalcula* "spermatozoa." Following Leeuwenhoek's publication of his findings with the British Royal Society in 1678, a great number of scientists reported related "findings," which

Bullough notes now appear comical, and again underscore the influence of cultural beliefs on scientific “facts”:

One observer reported seeing a miniature horse in the semen of a horse, and another, a miniature donkey in the semen of a donkey. Still others distinguished male and female sperm. Some even believed they saw male and female sperm copulating and then giving birth to little sperm. The effect, in spite of some of the ludicrous tales, was to reassert, at least in many minds, the male’s supremacy. (Bullough 12)

Not until the late nineteenth century (1879) did the scientist Herman Fol observe spermatozoon penetrating an egg, providing evidence of the moment of human fertilization, but the ova in the human female were not observed until the twentieth century (Bullough 13).¹⁸

Since the discovery in 1956 by J.H.Tijio and A.Levan that the human cell had only 46 chromosomes, instead of the 48 that scientists had long hypothesized, there has been a great deal of research on the chromosomal level of human sexuality as scientists attempt to ascertain “the actual nature of femaleness and maleness” (Bullough 13).¹⁹ The discovery of the sex-determining chromosomes, X and Y, seemed to give scientific proof of the binary division of sex: two X chromosomes (XX) in the fertilized egg led to the birth of a female; an X chromosome and a Y chromosome (XY) led to the birth of a male. Since the 1960s, however, further research has demonstrated that there are actually a number of genetic possibilities, other than XX or XY, that entail combinations of chromosomes and of sexual characteristics. Butler, referring to the work by Dr. David Page and his coworkers at MIT in the late 1980s, notes that “a good ten percent of the population has chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX-female and XY-male set of categories” (*Gender Trouble* 107). The viable genetic possibilities include X, XXX, XXY, and XYY, as well as a condition called “mosaicism” in which some of an individual’s cells have extra or missing chromosomes. X individuals have nonfunctional or nonexistent ovaries, while the fertility of XXX individuals is usually diminished. In XXY individuals, we find extremely small penises, shrunk testicles, and such a low output of testicular androgen that the individual forms female breasts (Bullough 13–14).

Even when the chromosomal pattern of an individual is standard, scientists are now aware of a number of other things that can influence sex development *in utero*, causing the individual to develop incomplete sexual features or a combination of sexual features. The testes of the male fetus, for example, secrete a “müllerian-inhibiting substance” at about the sixth week of fetal development that suppresses additional growth of the primitive müllerian ducts, according to Bullough (14). A lack of this müllerian-inhibiting substance, however, can create an anatomically ambiguous being:

If for some reason this substance fails to be secreted in a genetically male embryo, a boy is born with a uterus and fallopian tubes in addition to normal internal and external male organs. The male organs are normal except for cryptorchidism (undescended testicles). (Bullough 14)

Bullough notes also that the addition of testosterone to the bloodstream of a female fetus can create a similarly mixed physicality in a genetic female:

If testosterone is added to the bloodstream of a genetic female fetus during a critical period in development, a girl will be born with either a grossly enlarged clitoris or, in rare instances, a normal-looking penis with an empty scrotum. In human beings such masculinization occurs in the fetus through an abnormal functioning of the adrenal cortex.²⁰

Bullough adds that since the development of external organs occurs during the last stage of embryonic development, “it is not uncommon for the external genitalia to be left unfinished, neither fully masculinized nor femi-nized” (14), which can cause difficulties if the sex category to which the infant had been assigned at birth comes into conflict with the changes that occur at puberty:

Since the unfinished state of either sex looks remarkably like that of the other in infants, this has caused great difficulties with infant sexual identification in the past. In countries and cultures that value having a male child, doubtful cases tended to be assigned to the male category, and this assignment caused considerable trauma in many individuals on reaching puberty. (Bullough 14–15)

Nonetheless, in spite of the chromosomal and developmental conditions that lead to mixed or ambiguous sexual features, Western culture has in the past and continues now to assign individuals at birth to one sexual category or the other. As Bullough notes above, at adolescence, individual’s assigned sex can come into conflict with his or her biological or chromosomal sex.

Studies of hermaphrodites by John Money and Joan and John Hampson at The Johns Hopkins University examined a number of cases in which an individual’s sex assignment did not correspond with his or her biological sex. These researchers began their work by classifying individuals in terms of the standard criteria of sex assignment: gonadal sex, hormonal sex, chromosomal sex, and internal and external genitalia. In the strong majority of cases, when there was a conflict between the individual’s biological sex and sex of assignment, the individual self-identified with the sex in which he or she had been socialized:

In the 20 patients in whom a contradiction was found between gonadal sex and sex of rearing, 17 disclosed themselves in a gender role concordant with their rearing. Of 27 patients whose hormonal functioning and secondary sexual body morphology contradicted their sex of rearing, 4 became ambivalent with respect to gender role as male or female, but 23 established gender roles consistent with their sex of rearing. As far as chromosomal sex was determined, [for] all 20 patients whose chromosomal sex differed from their assigned sex, it was found that the gender role and sexual orientation were in accordance with socially assigned sex and rearing. In 22 of 25 individuals the gender role agreed

with the assigned sex and rearing and was not in accord with the predominant male or female internal accessory structure. Where sex of rearing was contradictory to the sex of the external genitalia, 23 of 25 individuals had been able to come to terms with their anomalous appearance and establish a gender role consistent with their assigned sex and rearing. In effect only 8 of the 131 comparisons (6 percent) did not show concordance of assigned sex and gender role. (Bullough 17)²¹

This important early study on sex and gender determination argues powerfully for the central role of socialization in the formation of one's gender role.²² Moreover, the fact that individuals with such contradictory sexual features and chromosomal or hormonal makeup had been assigned to only one sexual category again reasserts the cultural need for a clear binary sexual division.²³

As we look back over the past several centuries at the early thinking and research on reproduction and sex determination, much of the material seems amusingly naïve and misguided. The impact of religious beliefs and cultural assumptions on these "facts" is immediately apparent, as is the role of socialization on the hermaphrodites in the research by Money and the Hampsons, and the role of the culturally dominant or preferred male sex role on the assignment of sex at birth to individuals whose anatomy may be ambiguous. Even in this more technologically advanced and presumably scientifically neutral modern era, however, contemporary feminist scientists argue convincingly that political interests continue to inform powerfully the research on the scientific basis for sex.²⁴ In *Gender Trouble*, Butler offers the striking example of the embryological work by Page and his coworkers at MIT, which Anne Fausto-Sterling discusses at length in her article, "Life in the XY Corral." Fausto-Sterling and Butler emphasize that Page's findings, as well as the questions that he poses at the outset, and, indeed, his foundational assumptions and discourse, demonstrate a male-oriented cultural prejudice.

Page and his coworkers claimed in 1987 to have discovered the "master gene," a specific DNA sequence on the Y chromosome which they named "TDF" or testis-determining factor, and referred to as "the binary switch upon which hinges all sexually dimorphic characteristics."²⁵ In order to arrive at this discovery, these researchers applied sophisticated technological means to samples of DNA from "a highly unusual group of people" (*Gender Trouble* 107), including individuals with XX chromosomes, but who were medically designated as males, and others with XY chromosomes, but who were medically designated as females.²⁶ Page and his research team hypothesized that there must be some sort of "master gene" that would be a more reliable basis for understanding sex-determination and sex-difference than chromosomal analysis since, as I noted previously, according to Page more than ten percent of the population has chromosomal variations other than XX-female or XY-male (*Gender Trouble* 107). Page and his team predicted that there existed a sequence of DNA, invisible under normal microscopic conditions, that determines the male sex. In these "unusual" individuals, this sequence of DNA must have been moved from its usual location on the Y chromosome to some other chromosome. Page concluded that if he could prove the translocatability of this previously undetectable DNA, we could understand why an XX male had no detectable Y chromosome, but was male, and why a female could have a "misplaced" Y chromosome, although she was female (*Gender Trouble* 107).

Butler adds, however, that Page's research was beset by problems. First, precisely the same sequence of DNA that Page thought to determine male-ness was also found present on the X chromosome of females (*Gender Trouble* 107). Butler notes ironically that Page's response to "this curious discovery" echoes thinking from a much earlier period on the male role in human sexuality: "Page first responded...by claiming that perhaps it was not the *presence* of the gene sequence in males versus its *absence* in females that was determining, but that it was *active* in males and *passive* in females (Aristotle's lives!)" (*Gender Trouble* 107, italics original). Fausto-Sterling also states that Page and his researchers neglected to mention in the publication of their findings that "the individuals from whom the gene samples were taken were far from unambiguous in their anatomical and reproductive constitutions" (*Gender Trouble* 107):

[T]he four XX males whom they studied were all sterile (no sperm production), had small testes which totally lacked germ cells, i.e., precursor cells for sperms. They also had high hormone levels and low testosterone levels. Presumably they were classified as males because of their external genitalia and the presence of testes.... Similarly...both of the XY females' external genitalia were normal, [but] their ovaries lacked germ cells. ("Life in the XY Corral," 328; cited in *Gender Trouble* 108)

As Butler emphasizes, if external genitalia were an adequate determinant of sexual designation, Page's research into the master gene would be unnecessary in the first place. One has to wonder why we should agree at all that these XX individuals are in fact males, and the XY individuals females (*Gender Trouble* 108). Butler further underscores Page's complicity with "cultural assumptions regarding the relative status of men and women and the binary relation of gender": "[Page's] framework suggests a refusal from the outset to consider that these individuals implicitly challenge the descriptive force of the available categories of sex; the question he pursues is that of how the 'binary switch' gets started, not whether the description of bodies in terms of binary sex is adequate to the task at hand" (*Gender Trouble* 109).

Page's research also suffers from the same kind of "nucleo-centric assumptions" that trouble the fields of embryology and molecular cell biology as a whole, according to Fausto-Sterling and Butler. Citing the work of geneticists Eva Eicher and Linda L. Washburn, Butler notes, after Fausto-Sterling, that "ovary determination is never considered in the literature on sex-determination and that femaleness is always conceptualized in terms of the absence of the male-determining factor or of the passive presence of that factor" (*Gender Trouble* 108).²⁷ Fausto-Sterling states that instead of viewing the nucleus of a cell as the "master or director"²⁸ of the new organism, which is the current dominant approach in these fields, one should look instead to the interaction between the nucleus and the cytoplasm: "[T]he question to ask is not how a cell nucleus changes during differentiation, but, rather, how the dynamic nuclear-cytoplasmic interactions alter during differentiations" ("Life in the XY Corral," 324-24; cited in *Gender Trouble* 109).

Finally, Butler points out that the language of science, rather than constituting some isolated, objective form of language, instead "participates in other kinds of languages and reproduces that cultural sedimentation in the objects it purports to discover and neutrally

describe" (*Gender Trouble* 109). In Page's work, Butler identifies two dominant discourses: "the cultural discourse that takes external genitalia to be the sure signs of sex, and does that in the service of reproductive interests, and the discourse that seeks to establish the male principle as active and monocausal, if not autogenetic" (*Gender Trouble* 110). Normally, Butler notes, the "discourse of reproduction" and the "discourse of masculine activity" "work together culturally," but since they come into conflict in Page's research as he attempts to designate a specific DNA sequence as the ultimate determinant of sex, Page chooses the principle of masculine activity, which situates his work within a cultural bias that weakens the validity of all of his findings and even the groundwork on which he bases his initial questions (*Gender Trouble* 110). Butler concludes her work on the manner in which political and cultural interests inform scientific research and thinking with an examination of the biases implied in sexual terminology in language in general. Monique Wittig has argued convincingly, Butler notes, that the category of sex itself is necessary only to a heterosexual perspective: "The category of sex belongs to a system of compulsory heterosexuality that clearly operates through a system of compulsory sexual reproduction" (*Gender Trouble* 110–11). Butler adds that the very terms "'masculine' and 'feminine,' 'male' and 'female,' exist *only* within the heterosexual matrix; indeed, they are the naturalized terms that keep that matrix concealed and, hence, protected from a radical critique" (*Gender Trouble* 111, *italics original*).²⁹ From this perspective, it seems clear that any scientific research exploring sex-differentiation or sex-determination risks reproducing the cultural norms of compulsory heterosexuality, even as the investigators may believe their work objective.

In the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, the suggestion that Silence's and Ahmed's bodies may be performatively constructed constitutes a literal enactment of Butler's thesis of the cultural construction of both sex and gender. Their mutable bodies bespeak the fallacy of the body as a prediscursive constant and underscore the inescapable presence of the "regulatory practices"³⁰ of dominant society in the creation of both sex and gender. The precise configuration of the "regulatory practices" that govern gender formation and identity construction must, of course, be historically specific and contextualized. Butler cautions against the use of "totalizing frames," such as "phallogocentrism," to represent the "monolithic cause of gender oppression" (18). She notes further that critical thinkers have conceived of the way in which regimes of power produce the identity concepts of sex in widely differing manners:

Consider the divergence between those positions, such as Irigaray's, that claim there is only one sex, the masculine, that elaborates itself in and through the production of the 'Other,' and those positions, Foucault's, for instance, that assume that the category of sex, whether masculine or feminine, is a production of a diffuse regulatory economy of sexuality. Consider also Wittig's argument that the category of sex is, under the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality, always feminine (the masculine remaining synonymous with the 'universal'). Wittig concurs, however paradoxically, with Foucault in claiming that the category of sex would itself disappear and, indeed, *dissipate* through the disruption and displacement of heterosexual hegemony. (18, *italics original*)

One of Butler's primary projects in *Gender Trouble* is to try to think through the "productive capacities" of these various "fields of power," while maintaining their unique complexities, in order to subvert them (18). For Butler, cross-dressing and other parodic sexual practices offer just such an opportunity: The "persistence and proliferation" of gender identities that fail to conform to the (traditional, heterosexual) "norms of cultural intelligibility... provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder" (17).

Literary texts such as the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* serve a decidedly political goal in Butler's analytical schema as they highlight precisely the restrictions and illusions of mandatory heterosexuality and of the primacy of sex over gender. Butler envisions an eventual new concept of "gender," freed from the limitations of its traditional definition, as an "open coalition": "[It] will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure" (16). Butler thus would like to see "gender" refer to one's identity and behavior in the moment—a variable, indeterminate and opened construct that could change freely, unconstrained by cultural dictates. This perspective, advocating an open concept of gender, as suggested by the cross-dresser's rejection of the primacy of sex over gender, holds a central position in contemporary feminist debates concerning the role of the body in the construction of identity.

FEMINISM AND THE (ANTI-)ESSENTIALISM DEBATES

Contemporary feminist critics have identified a number of potential problems with Butlerian social constructionism and with feminist anti-essentialism more generally. These debates can help identify some of the contemporary political issues at stake in the essentialist and social constructionist arguments within the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, or in the reading of either text as ultimately essentialist or social constructionist. In their 1994 book, *The Essential Difference*, editors Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed bring together eight essays that consider the problem of the relationship of essentialism to feminism. Schor declares, in her introduction to the volume, that anti-essentialism has become in contemporary feminist circles the only *politically correct* point of view (vii). It has "won the day" to the point of becoming "dogma" (xvii):

What revisionism, not to say essentialism, was to Marxist-Leninism, essentialism is to feminism: the prime idiom of intellectual terrorism and the privileged instrument of political orthodoxy. Borrowed from the time-honored vocabulary of philosophy, the word essentialism has been endowed within the context of feminism with the power to reduce to silence, to excommunicate, to consign to oblivion. Essentialism in modern-day feminism is anathema. (42)³¹

In the *Roman de Silence*, many of the scholars who read Silence's assumption of a feminine gender and marriage to the king in the conclusion of the romance as the "victory of Nature" lament the ending precisely because of this view of essentialism as fundamentally confining and restrictive. Similarly, Simpson has criticized Ben Jelloun for "giving in to his critics" in the sequel to *L'Enfant de sable*, *La Nuit sacrée*, and "pinning down the fluidity, the multiplicity of sexuality and voices" he had left "so intriguingly open" in the first book by depicting Ahmed in *La Nuit sacrée* as clearly female (331).³²

Of course, as Schor stresses, it is the role of the body in the construction of sex and gender that most pointedly distinguishes feminist essentialism from social constructionism:

Essentialism in the specific context of feminism consists in the belief that woman has an essence, that woman can be specified by one or a number of inborn attributes which define across cultures and throughout history her unchanging being and in the absence of which she ceases to be categorized as a woman. In less abstract, more practical terms, an essentialist in the context of feminism is one who instead of carefully holding apart the poles of sex and gender maps the feminine onto femaleness, one for whom the body, the female body that is, remains, in however complex and problematic a way the rock of feminism. (42–43)³³

Schor notes, however, that anti-essentialism, in its definition (as above) of essentialism, and its reaction against such a definition is itself essentialist: "Anti-essentialism operates precisely in this manner, that is by essentializing essentialism, by proceeding as though there were one essentialism, an essence of essentialism" (43). Schor proposes instead an examination of "the multiplicity of essentialisms"³⁴—distinguishing "French essentialism"³⁵ from the native variety, naïve essentialism from strategic essentialism, heterosexual from homosexual," etc. (43).

Schor adds that "real essentialism inheres in language" (xi), while Robert Scholes states more categorically that "language always essentializes" (119). Anti-essentialism, Schor states, "in its zeal to jettison the body, tends toward an idealist view of language.... [It] fails to take into account the workings of language" (xi). For this reason, Schor notes, deconstructionism takes essence very seriously. She emphasizes that we must first carefully define the terms, distinguish essentialism from universalism, biologism and naturalism, and disentangle the various strains within anti-essentialism (xi).

Both Diana Fuss and Teresa de Lauretis have attempted to reconfigure the essentialism/anti-essentialism debates through a redefinition of the term "essence." Looking back to Aristotle and Locke, Fuss explains the Lockean distinction between a solid, fixed *real* essence and a changeable, unfixed *nominal* one:

Real essence connotes the Aristotelian understanding of essence as that which is most irreducible and unchanging about a thing; nominal essence signifies for Locke a view of essence as merely a linguistic convenience, a classificatory fiction we need to categorize and to label. (Fuss, 99; see also John Locke, 13.6)³⁶

Fuss argues that we can best understand the contemporary feminist category of “women” as a nominal essence, a linguistic category that feminists invoke for political reasons, rather than a “natural” category (99–100).

Similarly, de Lauretis declares that since most contemporary feminists accept the sociocultural constructedness of gender and the historical existence of patriarchy, then the “essence” that even the feminist essentialists describe in their own writings is much more of a nominal, and perhaps utopian, essence than a real one:

In other words, barring the case in which woman’s ‘essence’ is taken as absolute being or substance in the traditional metaphysical sense..., for the great majority of feminists the ‘essence’ of woman is more like the essence of the triangle than the essence of the thing-in-itself: it is the specific properties (e.g., a female-sexed body), qualities (a disposition to nurturance, a certain relation to the body, etc), or necessary attributes (e.g., the experience of femaleness, of living in the world as female) that women have developed or have been bound to historically, in their differently patriarchal sociocultural contexts, which make them women, and not men. (4)

For de Lauretis, understanding this distinction between real and nominal essence is enough to shift the focus of the entire debate. She prefers to leave behind the battles over the definition of Woman or of women and, in her essay, “The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously,” to focus instead on the historical specificity of feminist theory itself.

Fuss, however, notes that whereas the distinction between real and nominal essence seems at first glance a convenient and lucid means of bypassing much of the essentialist/anti-essentialist conflict, it is not actually so easy to maintain a clear distinction between the two terms: “Nominal essences are often treated by post-Lockeans as if they were real essences” (100). Schor agrees with Fuss’s criticism of the application of the two terms and adds furthermore that the nominal/real distinction itself posits the clearly impossible existence of referents free of language: “The distinction between nominal and real essences keeps alive the dream of an essentialism without a body, a language without a referent, or better, a referent outside of language” (x). Schor concludes that “the net effect” of the deconstruction of essentialism is “to show that although essentialism is neither a universalism nor a biologism, it is not for all that a singular thing;...there is no real essence of essentialism, but a whole series of nominal essences” (xi).

As concerns the role of essentialism or Nature in the *Roman de Silence* and in *L’Enfant de sable* and my own analysis tracing a social constructivist perspective through these works, it is important to bear in mind the specifics of the essentialist argument in each of these texts. While I have identified largely parallel thematic and narrative concerns in these two texts, I do not maintain that the particular configuration of the essentialist argument, or the sociocultural logic behind it, is the same in both works. In the *Roman de Silence*, for example, many of Nature’s arguments against Silence’s cross-dressing approach the situation as a matter of personal pride. Nature feels offended that Silence would dare dismiss her considerable effort in creating the most lovely girl

possible.³⁷ We also find a much greater concern with what is lawful and natural in a socioreligious sense. Nature, who is herself the “handmaiden” of God, contests Silence’s cross-dressing as a slight against God and the proper arrangement of society (2541, 2551–4, and elsewhere). In *L’Enfant de sable*, on the other hand, Ahmed’s conflicts as a cross-dresser revolve more around notions of psychological authenticity or veracity. Although Silence also does express personal confusion as to his/her “real” identity, Ahmed’s anguish is more acute and occupies a more central position in the essentialist battles within the work.

In a similar fashion, just as I do not see the specifics of the essentialist arguments in the two works as equal, I also do not intend to present a case for the historical accuracy of the presentation of a misogynistic dominant patriarchy (itself as essentialist category) in either of these periods. Indeed, there are scholars who refute the inescapable prevalence of misogyny in both settings. Brinda Mehta, for example, in “Proclaiming a New Order: Daughters in Action in the Mother-Daughter Dyad,” opposes the representation of mothers as acquiescent accomplices to patriarchal ideology that she identifies in Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable* and *Les Yeux baissés*. Rather, Mehta maintains that women are tremendously powerful in Moroccan society: “The feminine, as Mernissi, Ghita El Khayat and others argue, is not a secondary force in Morocco” (39)³⁸ According to Mehta, the antagonistic and submissive representations of women found in Ben Jelloun’s (and others’) works are a reaction against the significant disruptive capacity of women rather than an accurate description of lived reality: “Female representations, as Fatima Mernissi points out in *The Veil and the Male Elite*, are objects of masculine readings where the specificity of the feminine is ironically established or conferred by its adherence to the dictates of the Name of the Father, symbolising law and authority” (39). Mehta adds that these restrictive fictional representations of women function to limit their “all-pervasive realm of influence in Moroccan society by reducing it to a monolith” (40).

But, while I do not claim any kind of absolute knowledge of the true status of women in either medieval England and France or contemporary Morocco, I do see a clear representation in both the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* of the power of the essentialist argument within these two literary cultures, as Nature and her spokespeople resist Cadór’s and Hadj Ahmed’s attempts to side-step the patrilinear laws of inheritance and the regulatory “laws” of sexualization through the cross-dressing of their respective offspring as males. Again, Silence and Ahmed themselves refute a strict essentialist perspective by successfully incorporating both a female physicality and a masculine gender, yet once their cross-dressed performances have been verified through their physical unveiling, the authorities impose upon them an essentialist alignment of sex and gender in which their gender performances must follow from their sex. Even for Ahmed, whose role as the drag queen Lalla Zahra enacts his/her own gender ambiguity, the tension, appeal and irony of the role is grounded in Oum Abbas’s essentialist reading of Ahmed as fundamentally (biologically, sexually) female. Ahmed’s role as Lalla Zahra is ironic because we (Oum Abbas, her son, the audience, and the reader) know that as Ahmed performs as a man impersonating a woman, “she” really is a woman impersonating a man, who is now impersonating a woman. For both Silence and Ahmed, their hybrid identities, as successful and captivating as they may be, run counter to their cultures’ understanding of gender as rising from sex in a direct and essentialist manner.

As we analyze and critique the essentialist perspective of these two cultures, a number of potential hazards present themselves. Schor has cautioned against essentializing essentialism by treating essentialism as “a singular thing”; Teresa de Lauretis, on the other hand, warns against “de-essentializing” terms to the point that they lose all critical value. De Lauretis notes that in its effort to “deconstruct and de-essentialize” women (Alcoff, cited by de Lauretis 9) poststructuralist anti-essentialism runs the risk of making “woman” a meaningless term:

Its absolute rejection of gender and its negation of biological determinism in favor of cultural-discursive determinism results, as concerns women, in a form of nominalism. If ‘woman’ is a fiction, a locus of pure difference and resistance to logocentric power, and if there is no woman as such, then the very issue of women’s oppression would appear to be obsolete and feminism itself would have no reason to exist. (9–10)³⁹

De Lauretis’s objections here point to a critical question within the feminist essentialism/anti-essentialism debates. Specifically, can there be an anti-essentialism that dispenses with the notion of “Woman” or even “women”? As Schor and Fuss note, the stumbling block for consensus among feminist critical thinkers lies in the order of events—whether politics precede alliance (as they do for Rooney and Fuss, for example) or whether commonality grounds politics (as for de Lauretis, Brennan, Braidotti and Haraway) (Schor xiv).⁴⁰ Among those who argue that it is commonality that grounds feminist politics, many advocate redefining “essence” for feminist change and movement, so that rather than referring to biological fixism, “essence” would become synonymous with empowering and dynamic identification (Schor xiv). Fuss stresses additionally that even if we retain some kind of notion of “women” for political purposes, we must remember that this term, like others, is a sociocultural construct that changes and evolves throughout history:

Many anti-essentialists fear that positing a political coalition of *women* risks presuming that there must first be a natural class of women; but this belief only masks the fact that it is coalition politics which constructs the category of women and men in the first place. Retaining the idea of women as a class, if anything, might help remind us that the sexual categories we work with are no more and no less than social constructions, subject-positions subject to change and to historical evolution. (112, *italics original*)

A comparison of the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* offers a particularly vivid example of historical specificity as concerns the categories of men and women and of the manner in which those presumably *essential* categories benefit the dominant social structure.

As a tactic for avoiding a loss of subject position and, hence, of critical potential that can result from the erasure of sexual (and other identity) categories, Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern Studies group advocate “a *strategic* use of positivistic essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (“Subaltern Studies” 205, *emphasis original*).⁴¹

Leslie Wahl Rabine cautions, however, as have many other critical thinkers, against the proponents of any feminist critique, whether essentialist or anti-essentialist, assuming that they can themselves break free of “dominant and traditional male discourse.” Rabine clarifies the naïveté of this perspective by noting our inevitable reliance on the dominant discourse: “Since the phallogentric symbolic order constitutes language and thought themselves, any attempt to formulate a discourse ‘outside’ of it would have to speak within its terms, and slide into either mirroring it or being recuperated back into it” (146). Rabine’s solution lies in incorporating into the discussion the realization of the *nonrepresentability* of that which lies outside of the dominant:

If feminism unavoidably harbors the nonrepresentable of its irresolvable but productive contradictions, why not assume and integrate consciously the conflicts and the sliding between their terms? While speaking either the discourse of difference or that of equality, it would make visible the impossibility of adequately representing the position it espouses, and thus point to the nonrepresentable. (146)

Rabine’s comment regarding the impossibility of feminist (or nondominant) representation within the phallogentric symbolic order finds echoes in the narrative and the physical levels in both the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* as each text explores the problem of direct representation. Through the subjective and material indeterminacy of Silence and Ahmed, both works indicate the impossibility of representing sufficiently their significant complexity. We have already seen how the numerous narrative ambiguities and contradictions in the two texts function to avoid a single reading or definition and to problematize linear reasoning more generally. Moreover, in their concluding episodes these two texts also depict within their narratives the inescapable and central role of the reader in the construction of Silence’s and Ahmed’s textual and sexual meaning.

MULTIPLE READERS/MULTIPLE READINGS

Diana Fuss’s discussion of the essentialism in anti-essentialism as inhering in “the notion of place or positionality” (105) highlights the critical role within these texts of characters as both inscribed and implied readers, as well as that of the outside reader of the work. In the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* we encounter numerous characters who read written texts within the two works, such as Ebain, Eufeme and the king of France in the *Roman de Silence*, and Ahmed and his/her anonymous correspondent in *L’Enfant de sable*, all of whom exchange letters, as well as the various narrators who read from Ahmed’s journal in *L’Enfant de sable*. Furthermore, Ebain’s and Oum Abbas’s “readings” of Silence’s and Ahmed’s bodies occupy a central role in each work. These multiple readers draw attention to the variety of subject positions of readers within these two texts. In this section, I will examine briefly the multiple readers of the *Roman de Silence* and *L’Enfant de sable* in order to consider the concept of the place of the reader or subject. I will not try to specify any single subject position but will propose that the

multiple positions of characters-as-reader present yet another textual site of variable meaning within these two narratives.

Arguing that social constructionism cannot itself dispense entirely with the idea of essence, Fuss states that, "What is *essential* to social constructionism is precisely this notion of 'where I stand,' of what has come to be called... 'subject positions'" (105, emphasis original).⁴² Fuss orients her essay, "Reading like a Feminist," around the debates over gender and reading, asking what it means to read (or write) "as a woman" or "as a man" or even "as a feminist."⁴³ Fuss rejects bodily experience or "the experience of real women" (Modleski 134) as adequate grounds for forming a class of readers because, she argues, these are too vague, variable and "seamless": "Even if we were to agree that experience is not merely constructed but also itself constructing, we would still have to acknowledge that there is little agreement amongst women on exactly what constitutes 'a woman's experience'" (100).⁴⁴ Extending these questions to a larger sphere, Fuss examines the Lacanian poststructuralist psychoanalytical concepts of the place of the subject and its central position within social constructionist theory.

According to Lacan, Fuss explains, the question "Who is speaking?" (or, in Fuss's analysis, "Who is reading?") must be reformulated as "Where am I speaking from?" However, while emphasizing the importance of the place of the subject, Lacan points out that it is "ultimately unlocalizable" (Fuss 105); the "'I' is always precarious and unstable" (Fuss 105). This fluid concept of the subject is affiliated with the contemporary feminist reconceptualization of the subject as a "site of multiple and heterogeneous difference" that moves "beyond the self/other, 'I'/'not-I' binarism central to Lacan's understanding of subject constitution and instead substitutes a notion of the 'I' as a complicated field of multiple subjectivities and competing identities" (109). Accordingly, any attempt that I might make to define *the* subject position of the reader of the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* would be meaningless and futile. When we attempt to pin down the subject, to identify specific subject positions, or the essence of subject positions, we run the risk of stereotyping and overemphasizing the fixed boundaries between subject-positions rather than the "fluid boundaries and continual commerce between them" (Fuss 110). From this analytical vantage point, literary cross-dressed characters such as Silence and Ahmed offer an appealing representation of just such a fluid, multiple and heterogeneous concept of the subject. Their hybrid and indeterminate sex-gender identities present a colorful depiction of the "continual commerce" between the traditional categories of male and female and refute dramatically the existence of fixed and untraversable boundaries between the two.

At the same time, however, as Fuss stresses, "We always read [write, think, live] *from somewhere*" (111, emphasis original) and we need to have the tools to discuss this: "The anti-essentialist 'where' is essential to the poststructuralist project of theorizing reading as a negotiation of socially constructed subject-positions.... Place can never be entirely displaced, as it were, from deconstruction" (111). In my analysis of the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable*, I see the significance of Fuss's emphasis on the necessity of acknowledging the essential concept of the place of subject positions as highlighting most particularly the place of the inscribed and implied readers within the narratives of these texts themselves. These readers include King Ebain and Oum Abbas, whose "readings" of Silence's and Ahmed's bodies carry profound implications for the future of these two hero(ine)s; in *L'Enfant de sable*, these readers include the multiple and conflicting

narrators whose various readings of Ahmed's journal constitute the narrative of Ahmed-Zahra's lifestory.

When King Ebain makes his pronouncement at the close of the *Roman de Silence*, "Nos veõns bien que tu iés feme" (6586), not only can we identify the omnipresent role of dominant male authority in the construction of Silence's sex and gender, but also simultaneously the critical role of the reader as the king "reads" Silence's body. Like King Ebain, the reader examines the signs and makes culturally intelligible sense of them. In the reader's venture, as in King Ebain's, there is always room for misreading, yet it is only through the act of reading that a story (or a subject) can become meaningful.

In the final pages of *L'Enfant de sable* we find the problem of subjective interpretation and the construction of meaning drawn into question radically and explicitly as five different narrators gather in a Moroccan café to offer varying versions of the close of the tale of Ahmed-Zahra. I have already touched on some of the differences between Salem's and Amar's visions of Ahmed-Zahra's physical body and the changes that it undergoes. Here, I will examine further the relationship between storyteller and story within *L'Enfant de sable*, as each narrator reads from Ahmed's journal and from that reading creates his or her own tale.

When, following the eviction and death of the principal storyteller, the three members of the original audience, Salem, Amar and Fatouma, offer their widely differing conclusions to the life story of Ahmed-Zahra, their versions underscore the extent to which narration is subjective and storytelling an oral reading. Salem, the first to propose his own account of the end of Ahmed-Zahra's life,⁴⁵ is a black man and the son of a slave brought to Morocco from Senegal by a rich trader at the turn of the century. Salem describes himself as an outcast because of his heritage, and his own version of Ahmed's story, after an initial slapstick description of Ahmed's burial,⁴⁶ is marked by sexual frustration and sadistic violence.

According to Salem, Zahra dies a gruesome and horrifying death at the hands of Abbas. In this account, Abbas is an unscrupulous physical and mental brute who practices black magic with his mother, and with whom he also maintains "une relation étrange" (141). One day, Abbas knocks down the door to Zahra's caravan and attempts to rape her "par derrière" (142). Abbas ejaculates before he is able to carry through, but returns shortly thereafter with handcuffs which he uses to attach her to the bars on the window. He proceeds to rape her with an old piece of wood and then he and his mother lock her into a circus cage. No longer man nor woman, but beast, a caged circus freak, Zahra endures this existence until one night, sensing that Abbas would try again to rape her, Zahra inserts two razor blades into her own anus. Abbas dies of a hemorrhage, but not before he strangles Zahra in rage (143).

Amar strongly disputes Salem's account of the end of Ahmed-Zahra's life. He underscores the central role of Salem's own perspective in his version of the story: "Assieds-toi! Tu ne vas pas t'en tirer comme cela! Ton histoire est atroce. Je suis sur que tu as tout inventé et que tu t'es identifié aussi bien à Abbas qu'à la malheureuse Zahra. Tu es un homme pervers" (144). In contrast, Amar claims to know the "true" ending of the story because he recovered the manuscript (Ahmed's supposed journal) after the first storyteller's death: "Je vous l'apporterai demain. Je l'avais racheté aux infirmiers de la morgue" (144).

Amar's version recounts several different episodes before settling finally on one that Amar presents as definitive. At first, Amar describes a corrupt and violent relationship between Abbas and his mother, marked by savage fighting and explosive curses. This relationship drives Ahmed to flee, and, once free, to regret "his"⁴⁷ own harsh treatment of "his" parents and of Fatima. Late one night, Ahmed seeks out Fatima's grave, according to Amar, and thinks of her with remorse. Sad, bitter and lost, Ahmed no longer knows where to go or who to be:

Il se dit qu'il n'avait de place ni dans la vie ni dans la mort, exactement comme il avait vécu la première partie de son histoire, ni tout a fait homme ni tout a fait femme. Il n'avait plus d'énergie, plus de force pour supporter son image. Le plus dur, c'est qu'il ne savait plus a quoi ni a qui il ressemblait. Plus aucun miroir ne lui renvoyait d'image. Ils étaient tous éteints.... Il savait qu'à partir de cet instant il était perdu. (149–50)

Following this conclusion, however, Amar reads aloud an entry from Ahmed's purported journal in which Ahmed him/herself describes his/her own readiness to embark on further self-discovery.

In this journal entry, Ahmed describes his/her physical body and features with some detail (152–53), as well as his/her complicity with Hadj Ahmed's plan. Finally, Ahmed imagines what it would have been like to have grown up as the eighth daughter instead of the first son, and he/she regrets not having revealed his/her identity earlier:

Je crois que je n'aurais pas pu vivre et accepter ce que mes soeurs comme les autres filles dans ce pays subissent. Je ne crois pas que je sois meilleure mais je sens en moi une telle volonté, une telle force rebelle, que j'aurais probablement tout chamboulé. Ah! Ce que je m'en veux a present de ne pas avoir plus tôt dévoilé mon identité et brisé les miroirs qui me tenaient éloignée de la vie. (153–54)

Of course, Ahmed's resistance, according to Amar, to the proper place of girls in his/her society is offered from the perspective of a person who has been raised as a man—the long-desired, privileged, first boy child of a successful and affluent father. It would be impossible to know whether, had Ahmed been raised as a girl instead, he/she would have accepted this life. Is Ahmed's *volonté*, his/her *force rebelle*, a product of his/her upbringing or an inalterable aspect of his/her personality? Nurture or Nature? Clearly, it is impossible to say. At the same time, Ahmed him/herself goes on to write that had he/she been a single woman in his/her society, "she" would have been isolated and rejected.

Finally, in Amar's narrative, following these personal and sociological reflections, Ahmed begins to meditate on the loss in contemporary Islam of the beautiful, passionate poetry of the past: "Tant de livres ont été écrits sur le corps, les plaisirs, les parfums, la tendresse, la douceur de l'amour entre homme et femme en Islam..., des livres anciens et que plus personne ne lit aujourd'hui. Où a disparu l'esprit de cette poésie?" (158, ellipses original). Contemplating these images, he/she gently "extinguishes" his/her own life (158). Yet, although Amar professes factual knowledge of this conclusion to Ahmed's

life in the form of Ahmed's own journal, Amar's narrative itself closes with a series of personal conjectures: "Je crois qu'il n'a jamais quitté sa chambre en haut sur la terrasse de la grande maison" (158); "Je pense qu'il a réussi les derniers moments de sa vie, quand il a atteint le haut degré de la contemplation" (159); "Je crois qu'il a connu la volupté née de cette béatitude acquise face au ciel étoilé" (159); "Il a dû mourir dans une grande douceur" (159). These culminate in Amar's "reading" of a final, *unwritten* entry from Ahmed's journal (159).

Fatouma, the last of the three audience members to offer a version of the end of Ahmed-Zahra's life, claims to be Ahmed-Zahra herself. She describes the painful cry of a woman who was imprisoned within Fatouma's chest,⁴⁸ and her eventual liberation (165), which leads Fatouma to decide to leave the remainder of her family, living in unhappy conditions in their now dilapidated house, and to disguise herself as a man in order to be able to travel freely alone (166).⁴⁹ In this disguise, Fatouma learns to "invent" her own life story: "J'ai appris ainsi à être dans le rêve et à faire de ma vie une histoire entièrement inventée, un conte qui se souvient de ce qui s'est réellement passé" (168). Fatouma continues this "invention" until she realizes that she has been deceiving herself as she misrepresented herself to others: "Alors je me suis mise à regarder autour de moi et ce que j'ai vu m'a profondément choquée, bouleversée. Comment ai-je pu vivre ainsi, dans une cage de verre, dans le mensonge, dans le mépris des autres? On ne peut passer d'une vie à une autre juste en enjambant une passerelle" (169). In spite of Fatouma's sense of inauthenticity, however, she was able, according to her narrative, to "step" simply and easily into another gender, another life.

Caught up inadvertently in a bloody and violent protest march, Fatouma receives a bullet wound in the shoulder and is taken in by some caring peasant women. From this moment on, she has been calling herself Fatouma and has been living as a woman. In the interim, however, she had lost her journal. Sitting in the audience during the telling of Ahmed-Zahra's story, Fatouma has enjoyed "reliving her life story" through the narratives of the various storytellers:

Entre-temps j'avais perdu le grand cahier où je consignais mon histoire. J'essayai de le reconstituer mais en vain; alors je sortis à la recherche du récit de ma vie antérieure. La suite vous la connaissez. J'avoue avoir pris du plaisir à écouter le conteur, puis vous. J'ai eu ainsi le privilège, vingt ans plus tard, de revivre certaines étapes de ma vie. (170)

Fatouma has thus ventured outward to recover the past. Her pleasure in listening to the various versions of her lifestory and her sense of reliving her life through the telling of these stories imply that all of the storytellers' versions held some truth. And although the reader or audience has no reason at this point to believe Fatouma's particular version over the others, or to accept her approval as an indication of ultimate truth value, her commentary summarizes nicely the extent to which the construction of stories and of meaning is always multiple and diverse. The meaning of the story, and of the life, is created through the telling (and, of course, through the reading or listening). Yet, while Fatouma does not condemn any inaccuracies or untruths, she does fear tripping up, confusing her two lives, and "losing the thread" of the present:

A présent je suis bien fatiguée. Je vous prie de me laisser. Comme vous le voyez, je suis vieille mais pas très âgée. Ce n'est pas courant d'être porteur de deux vies. J'ai tellement peur de m'embrouiller, de perdre le fil du présent et d'être enfermée dans ce fameux jardin lumineux d'où pas un mot ne doit filtrer. (170)

Fatouma's ultimate fear, then, would be isolation, imprisonment in silence, banishment from the world of new stories and new life.

The final two storytellers, *le troubadour aveugle* and *l'homme au turban bleu*, offer still other versions of the story of Ahmed-Zahra, giving even more dramatic depictions of narrative openendedness and nonrepresentability. Rather than a direct correspondence between the event and its narrative representation, we find incongruity and confusion. The repeated and enduring confusion or blurring of fiction, dream and reality mark the narrative of the *troubadour aveugle*, himself a transparent allusion to Borges, as many commentators have noted. The *troubadour aveugle* joins Salem and Amar at their table in the café as they contemplate the close to Fatouma's tale. His first utterance is an enigmatic one: "Le Secret est sacré, mais il n'en est pas moins un peu ridicule" (171). He then goes on to "introduce" himself in a similarly mystifying fashion: "Et puis vous allez sans doute me demander qui je suis, qui m'a envoyé et pourquoi je débarque ainsi dans votre histoire ... Vous avez raison. Je vais vous expliquer... Non... Sachez simplement que j'ai passé ma vie à falsifier ou altérer les histoires des autres" (171, ellipses original). He adds again shortly thereafter, "Je suis le biographe de l'erreur et du mensonge" (173). He does not claim any real or factual component to his stories or to his own memories, and acknowledges that he changes his stories according to their reception: "J'aime inventer mes souvenirs. Cela dépend du visage de mon interlocuteur" (171). He situates himself also within a tale, and describes his interest in the story of Ahmed-Zahra as owing to its artificiality: "Je viens du loin, d'un autre siècle, verse dans un conte par un autre conte, et votre histoire, parce qu'elle n'est pas une traduction de la réalité, m'intéresse" (172). As the reader identifies multiple layers that blur the life and fiction of Borges with that of Ahmed-Zahra, the *troubadour aveugle* reads a passage from a story that he has lived ("je vous livre les dernières phrases de l'histoire que j'ai vécue" [173]). In this passage, the *troubadour aveugle* recounts a character's realization of his own fictionality, underscoring also the illusory quality of life:

Dans une aube sans oiseaux le magicien vit fondre sur les murs l'incendie concentrique. Un instant, il pensa se réfugier dans les eaux, mais il comprit aussitôt que la mort venait couronner sa vieillesse et l'absoudre de ses travaux. Il marcha sur les lambeaux de feu. Ceux-ci ne mordirent pas sa chair, ils le caressèrent et l'inondèrent sans chaleur et sans combustion. Avec soulagement, avec humiliation, avec terreur, il comprit que lui aussi était une apparence, qu'un autre était en train de le rêver. (173)

It is with relief as well as terror that this character comes to realize that he is himself merely an appearance, the contents of someone else's dreams.

The fusion of fiction and reality continues as the *troubadour aveugle* tells of the arrival of an Islamic woman one day in his library in Buenos Aires. This woman's rough and ambiguously gendered voice recalls that of Ahmed-Zahra. Noting that he had already "heard" her voice before in a book, the *troubadour aveugle* adds to the literary layering of his tale:

J'ai rarement entendu une voix aussi grave et aiguë en même temps. Voix d'homme qui aurait subi une opération sur les cordes vocales? Voix de femme blessée a vie? Voix d'un castrat vieilli avant l'âge? Il me semblait avoir déjà entendu cette voix dans un des livres que j'avais lus. C'était, je crois, dans un des contes des *Mille Nuits et Une Nuit*. (174)

The mysterious Islamic woman gives him a *bâtêne*, a coin that depicts a man on one side and a woman on the other, which he compares to an Argentine coin called a *Zahir*,⁵⁰ then she surveys the room until she finds a manuscript of the Koran, from which she begins to read quietly aloud. At this point, the *troubadour aveugle* notes that he felt like he was a character in a book: "Situation étrange! On aurait dit que j'étais dans un livre, un de ces personnages pittoresques qui apparaissent au milieu d'un récit pour inquiéter le lecteur" (177). Of course, although he appears near the end rather than the middle of the novel, he is indeed a picturesque and perplexing addition to the story of Ahmed-Zahra.

As the sun sets on his library, the *troubadour aveugle* has a vision of death and states that from that moment he became entirely swept up in the story of his puzzling visitor: "A partir de cette vision, je n'étais plus le même, je venais de mettre tout mon corps dans un engrenage" (178). Again, he relates his current situation to that of a story and recalls again the images of the unfixed and mutable, of sand and ambiguity:

Je me dis, à force d'inventer des histoires avec des vivants qui ne sont que des morts et de les jeter dans des sentiers qui bifurquent ou dans des demeures sans meubles, remplies de sable, à force de jouer au savant naïf, voilà que je suis enfermé dans cette pièce avec un personnage ou plutôt une énigme, deux visages d'un même être complètement embourbé dans une histoire inachevée, une histoire sur l'ambiguïté et la fuite! (178)

He also adds at this point that he had recently received several letters, signed by an old friend, concerning the approaching arrival of this mysterious Islamic woman—an additional piece of information that becomes even more baffling when he explains that the old friend, Stephen Albert, has been "mort depuis longtemps" and is a character from one of his books (181). But this does not trouble him unduly. He states simply: "Cela m'était déjà arrive de recevoir des lettres signées du nom d'un de mes personnages. Après tout je n'inventais rien.... Je n'ai cessé toute ma vie d'opposer le pouvoir des mots ...à la force du monde réel et imaginaire, visible et caché" (181).

When the Islamic woman tells the *troubadour aveugle* that she has sought him out in order to try to find forgiveness and peace, his overly hasty response condemns her instead of freeing her. Now, in a Moroccan café, he explains to Salem, Amar, Fatouma and the others who have gathered at his table in the course of his tale, that he has travelled to Marrakesh in search of her, in an effort to repair his damage. Near the close of his

narrative, he calls out to her: “Je suis arrive dans ce pays, porté par ma solitude, et je vous cherche au fond de la nuit, princesse échappée d’un conte; vous qui m’écoutez, si vous la voyez, dites-lui que l’*homme qui fut aimé par la lune* est là, que je suis le secret et l’esclave, l’amour et la nuit” (185, italics original). At the request of one of his audience members, he tells more about the woman’s life in Buenos Aires, including her relationship with a rich Latin American Arab, a rug and jewel merchant, and describes four cryptic objects that she gave to him (“des signes à déchiffrer”): “un anneau comportant sept clés pour ouvrir les sept portes de la ville,” “une petite horloge sans aiguille ...de 1851, exactement l’année où la monnaie [la bâttène]...fut frappée en Egypte,” “un tapis de prières où est reproduit, dans une trame désordonnée, la fameuse *Nuit de noces de Chrosroës et Hirin*,” and “le récit d’un rêve qui commence par un poème qu’elle attribue a Firdoussi qui vécut au Xe siècle” (189–90). The passage of the poem that he reads concludes with an imaginary (literary or painterly) vision of the Orient: “Le rêve nous emmène vers les portes du desert, dans cet Orient imagine par des écrivains et des peintres” (190). The points of contact between these four objects and the story of Ahmed-Zahra (the seven doors on the ring which recall the seven “portes” of *L’Enfant de sable*; the repetition of the image of the coin that depicts a set of male and female twins on its two sides, etc.) again underscore the fusion of reality and the imaginary, as the mysterious and evocative images that they call forth highlight the beautiful and exotic aspect of art.

In the final passages of the blind troubadour’s narrative, he tells of an extended dream vision that quickly turns into a nightmare as he senses he is being stalked by Death. While he recounts this vision, dream images become intermingled with lived experiences and he no longer knows what is real and what is imaginary. This is certainly also the reader’s position regarding the life story of Ahmed-Zahra. “Ai-je rêvé la nuit andalouse,” the *troubadour aveugle* asks aloud, “ou l’ai-je vécue?” (197). He has no answer to his own question, and closes his narrative with the recitation of a poem by a twelfth-century poet, le Diwan d’Almoqtâdir El Maghrebi. He claims not to identify himself with the speaker but the parallels between the literary work and his actual situation are again apparent. Repeatedly and on multiple levels, the *troubadour aveugle* blurs the categories of reality, fiction and dream, and refutes narrative closure. After he has finished recounting his tale, he falls asleep for a bit and then he awakens and makes his way over to a group of people gathered around a woman telling a story. He joins the group midway through the woman’s narrative:

Ils sont autour d’une dame tout vêtue de blanc et qui parle lentement. On fait place à l’aveugle qui s’assied, croisant les jambes. Toute son attention est concentrée sur la voix de la dame. Il passe ainsi d’une histoire dont il croyait avoir les clefs à un conte dont il ne connaît ni le début ni le sens. Il est heureux de se trouver embarqué au milieu d’une phrase comme si son voyage dans la médina se poursuivait selon son désir avec la passion de perdre son chemin et de sombrer dans le labyrinthe qu’il avait dessiné dans sa bibliothèque de Buenos Aires. (202)

The blind troubadour’s happiness at finding himself “embarked” once again on a new tale, even though he does not know the beginning or understand its meaning, attests to the

seduction of storytelling itself. As throughout *L'Enfant de sable*, the focus here is on the appeal of the telling, rather than the outcome. As we have seen, time and again the thematic and the narrative techniques of *L'Enfant de sable* reject narrative linearity and predictability in favor of ambiguity and openendedness.

Once the *troubadour aveugle* has stopped his tale, the final narrator in *L'Enfant de sable*, *l'homme au turban bleu*, makes his way across the café slowly and with difficulty. He is old and his *bourous* is dirty and worn; under his arm he carries “un vieux cartable” from which he removes “un grand cahier use” (200). The reader and the audience have by now heard so many narrators claim to possess or to have seen Ahmed-Zahra's *true* journal that his similar reference to it does not stand out particularly: “Sans prévenir, il lève le cahier en l'air et dit: ‘Tout est là... Dieu est témoin’” (200). This time, however, he does not maintain as the others have done that this journal provides him with a privileged knowledge of Ahmed-Zahra's true life story. Rather, while reiterating his statement that the journal contains *all*, he shows that it is in fact unreadable and virtually empty: “Il s'arrête un moment, fixe le grand cahier, l'ouvre, tourne les pages: elles sont vides. En les examinant de près on constate qu'il y a encore des traces d'écriture, des bouts de phrases à l'encre pâle, des petits dessins anodins au crayon gris” (201). *L'homme au turban bleu* reveals himself to be the narrator who began the tale of Ahmed, the narrative voice of the first half of *L'Enfant de sable*, who disappeared midway through the story. Amar had even claimed that this narrator had died, which provided Amar with the opportunity to buy Ahmed's journal from the nurses at the morgue. He reappears now, however, quite alive, and he concludes his tale of Ahmed-Zahra by saying that he does not know the conclusion—that no one can.

L'homme au turban bleu explains his disappearance to the audience by relating that, against his will, Death had begun to interfere with his storytelling, taking away one after another of his characters while he slept: “Je parlais le soir, au milieu de récit, promettant la suite des aventures à mon assistance fidèle pour le lendemain. Quand je revenais, l'histoire était déjà achevée. La mort s'était, la nuit durant, acharnée sur les principaux personnages. Je me retrouvais ainsi avec des bouts d'histoire, empêché de vivre et de circuler” (203). In this manner, the final tale of *l'homme au turban bleu* intersects with that of the *troubadour aveugle*. In both instances, Death plays a central role in their visions and both storytellers describe contacts with their fictional characters outside of their own stories. Furthermore, in each case the ultimate fear is silence, the loss of his story. *L'homme au turban bleu* clarifies that at an earlier point he had to stop recounting his stories and leave because he was lost as a storyteller, his stories were slipping away from him: “Ce n'était même pas une question de stérilité, car j'étais en possession d'un stock important d'histoires. Il suffisait de commencer à les raconter pour qu'elles se vident de leur substance” (203).

Within the tale of *l'homme au turban bleu* there develops a mysterious, even supernatural aspect as Death comes to inhabit the character of Ahmed-Zahra him/herself:

La mort m'apparut sous les traits d'un personnage, la huitième naissance,⁵¹ Ahmed ou Zahra, et qui m'a menacé de toutes les foudres du ciel. Il me reprochait d'avoir trahi le secret, d'avoir souillé par ma présence l'Empire du Secret, là où le Secret est profond et caché. J'étais

habité par Es-ser El Mekhfi, le Secret supreme. Tellement enfoui qu'il me manipulait a mon issu. (203)

The other characters in the story of Ahmed-Zahra's life also step beyond their narrative frame and challenge him: "Les personnages que je croyais inventer surgissaient sur ma route, m'interpellaient et me demandaient des comptes.... Ce fut ainsi que le père d'Ahmed me séquestra dans une vieille bâtisse et exigea de moi de retourner a la place raconter l'histoire autrement" (204). Ahmed's mother also appears to him. She spits constantly, her eyes glassy; she frightens him. Fatima, on the other hand, is now healed and happy. She flaunts her freedom in the face of his misery:

Elle me dit sur un ton serein: Tu me reconnais à présent? Je suis celle que tu as choisie pour être la victime de ton personnage. Tu t'es vite débarrassé de moi. A présent je reviens visiter les lieux et observer les choses que tu voulais éternelles. Je vois, le pays n'a pas changé. Et toi, tu es perdu. Tu as égaré ton histoire et ta raison.... Je reviens sur les pas de ton histoire. Je compte les morts et j'attends les survivants. Tu ne peux rien contre moi. J'appartiens à cette éternité dont tu parles sans la connaître. (205)

This speech by Fatima and most particularly the phrase, "Je suis celle que tu as choisie pour être la victime de ton personnage. Tu t'es vite débarrassé de moi" (205), highlights the storyteller's construction of the story itself as it underscores the arbitrary aspect of his narrative choices. Additionally, her commentary serves as a kind of autocritique, coming as it does within the storyteller's own final episode of his tale. The numerous storytellers and versions of the lifestory of Ahmed-Zahra have repeatedly emphasized the multiple narrative possibilities of the tale and its subjectivity; Fatima's comments as related by *l'homme au turban bleu* also underscore the capriciousness of any one of those narratives.

At the close of his tale, *l'homme au turban bleu* tells his audience that he first learned of the story of Ahmed from a poor woman from Alexandria. The Alexandrian woman came to see *l'homme au turban bleu* one day, he relates, in order to be relieved of the burden of the story of her family member, Bey Ahmed. This Alexandrian woman thus recalls the mysterious Islamic woman who came to the *troubadour aveugle* to ask him for forgiveness, creating another parallel between this narrator's conclusion and the story told by the *troubadour aveugle*. The Alexandrian woman explains to *l'homme au turban bleu* how and why she chose him as the recipient of her tale:

De tous les conteurs de la place, dont elle avait suivi les récits, ce fut moi qu'elle choisit. Elle me le dit d'emblée: 'Je les ai tous écoutés, seul vous seriez capable de raconter l'histoire de mon oncle qui était en fait ma tante. J'ai besoin d'être délivrée du poids de cette énigme. C'est un secret qui a pesé longtemps sur notre famille. On a découvert la véritable identité de mon oncle le jour de sa mort. Depuis nous vivons un cauchemar. J'ai pensé qu'en rendant publique cette histoire on en ferait une légende, et,

comme chacun sait, les mythes et les légendes sont plus supportables que la stricte réalité.' (207–8).

The storyteller himself acknowledges that her confidence in his abilities was not confirmed—yet another parallel between this woman's search for peace and solace and that of the mysterious Islamic woman in the episode with the *troubadour aveugle*. The Alexandrian woman's comment at the end that myths and legends are easier to bear than "strict reality" seems rather ironic, however, once the boundaries between truth, fiction, myth and reality have become thoroughly blurred as the audience injects itself into the narrative, multiple narrators vie for the *true* tale, and characters from within the narrative step outside of their tales to talk with and even challenge their storytellers. Furthermore, the man in the blue turban's storytelling-induced disequilibrium belies the Alexandrian woman's contention that myths are easier to bear than reality.

L'homme au turban bleu says that it took the Alexandrian woman two days to tell in detail the story of Bey Ahmed. As he listened, he thought about how he would be able to adapt the tale to his own country, noting that "après tout il y a peu de difference entre nos deux sociétés arabes et musulmanes, féodales et traditionnelles" (208). Before leaving, the woman confers to him Bey Ahmed's journal of more than two hundred pages. The storyteller says that he read it and reread it and was each time increasingly disturbed. He was uncertain of what to do with this story, so he simply began to tell it, but he soon found himself imbricated: "Plus j'avais, plus je m'enfonçais dans le puits" (208). When the bright light of the moon washes clean the contents of the journal and the storyteller himself forgets everything that he had read, his initial fear is followed by relief. With his last sentences *l'homme au turban bleu* releases himself from the responsibility of telling the story and invites the audience to pursue it themselves if they are interested.

Whereas the final passages of the *troubadour aveugle* bespeak the seduction of storytelling and the pleasure of finding oneself drawn into a new tale, those of *l'homme au turban bleu* relate the seeming autonomy of narration, its bewildering power and apparent independence from the teller, and its propensity to exceed its own limits and to set off on new paths. At the close of his tale, *l'homme au turban bleu* describes his release from the responsibility of telling this tale as a "délivrance" (209). Although he notes the constructedness of his tale, in the final episode *l'homme au turban bleu* re-emphasizes the volatility and lack of stability of the narrative. Like the indefinite and mutable character of Ahmed-Zahra him/herself, the narrative of *L'Enfant de sable* cannot be pinned down. It remains elusive and openended. For some readers, like the *troubadour aveugle*, the appeal and draw of narrative lies in this baffling slipperiness, in the process of story-telling itself rather than in a clear sequence of events. Other readers, like *l'homme au turban bleu*, would prefer to be relieved of such an invasive and troubling indeterminacy.

SEXUAL-GENERIC AMBIGUITY AND NARRATIVE OPENENDEDNESS

In the *Roman de Silence*, Silence's ambiguity and the openendedness of the narrative are artificially "tamed" and disambiguated by Silence's marriage to King Ebain and by the assertion of narrative closure in the final passages of the romance. Although this positive and clear-cut conclusion affirms the narrator's determination to end his tale with an image of tidy resolution, it leaves untouched the many ambiguities that comprise the body of his tale. In *L'Enfant de sable*, we find no attempt even at such closure, however artificial it might be. *L'homme au turban bleu* deposits his now-illegible notebook before his audience in the café and departs. The interpretation and continuation of his tale are left in the hands of his audience and readers.

On a physical level, Silence's and Ahmed's status at the end of the two works remains uncertain. Although both texts initially present their bodies at birth as clearly sexed female, in the course of the narratives it appears that their male gender performances have altered their physical bodies, creating a beard, deep voice, slim hips and lack of breasts for Ahmed, and the unspecified male features that it took Nature three days to erase from Silence at the close of the *Roman de Silence*. This generic "construction" of the sexed body parallels and elaborates on the social construction of gender that takes place at the forefront of the narrative in each work. The unavoidable extent to which dominant society constructs the laws, definitions and norms of gender within that culture comprises the rationale behind Cador and Hadj Ahmed's cross-dressing schemes in the first place. The social construction of sex itself and the realization of gender and sex as ultimately synonymous in the traditional binary understanding of sex-gender identity are also revealed through the pervasive influence of cultural laws on Silence's and Ahmed's identity. In neither case do we find (nor can there be) a prediscursive sex. Silence's and Ahmed's sex is described at birth by their fathers, the immediate authorities in these patriarchal cultures.

Yet, whereas Silence's and Ahmed's cross-dressing is rationalized as necessary or at least reasonable in their given situations, and whereas the powers of nature and nurture work within the two texts to resist their resulting hybrid identities, Silence's and Ahmed's sexual-generic ambiguity functions as an intriguing, powerful and even seductive force within the two works. From a feminist analytical viewpoint, the multiple, fluid, blurred identities of Silence and Ahmed offer an appealing representation of a new, open, heterogeneous reconceptualization of gender that would free women and men from the restrictions and limitations of traditional binary roles.

Beyond this current political concern, however, the physical indeterminacy and narrative openendedness that we find in the *Roman de Silence* and in *L'Enfant de sable* form part of a larger exploration during both the medieval and contemporary periods of the French-speaking world (and beyond) of the indeterminate, mutable and monstrous, of that which crosses boundaries or defies the very existence of those boundaries. This exploration highlights a shared cultural fascination and aesthetic during these two periods. In my concluding chapter, I will examine the role of the monstrous in medieval and contemporary French culture and will close with some observations and questions regarding the implications of this shared cultural obsession.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The Hybrid as Frame

As we have seen in this study of the medieval and modern cross-dressers, Silence and Ahmed, the hybrid figure and the narrative openedness that characterizes much of the two works that feature them raise fundamental epistemological questions. Although the historical contexts differ markedly, the challenge to narrative closure in both periods interrogates the exigency and merit of other master narratives, while the physical indeterminacy of the hybrid figure destabilizes traditional organizational categories and the accepted natural order as it draws into question the relationship of the sign to the signified and the adequacy of binary thinking. Other medieval and modern hybrids, such as the werewolves, serpent-women and wild men that I touched on briefly in my introductory chapter, further engage with these shared concerns. Although certainly not all medieval or modern monsters are charged with such portentous symbolic freight, we can assert generally that hybridism and monstrous deformation draw into question at the most basic level the philosophical assumptions that underlie the system of categories and hierarchies through which we order our universe. “The monster engages at a fundamental level,” David Williams states, “the very principle of order developed in Western thought” (14). At the same time, while posing a challenge to the accepted “natural” order, the hybrid being also functions as a kind of frame, orienting and focusing the reader’s attention within these narratives, and carrying on a dialogue with other more dominant narrative voices. Much like the monsters and fantastic creatures who fill the margins of medieval illustrated manuscripts, medieval and modern hybrid narrative characters comment on and critique the discourses that run through their texts. In this concluding chapter, I will expand my focus to discuss more generally the manner in which the hybrid figure upsets the traditional order as it frames and critiques larger philosophical concerns.

My concept of the interrelationship between the dominant and the marginal, or the center and the margins, and the notion of the margin as both a critique of the center and a framing device for that which lies inside draw from central ideas in the works of a number of contemporary critical thinkers. David Williams, for example, in *Deformed Discourse* emphasizes the necessary interplay and interdependence between the traditional or dominant and the oppositional, between affirmative and negative philosophical thinking, within the medieval teratological tradition. “The language of the monstrous is parasitic,” Williams states, “depending on the existence of conventional

languages; it feeds, so to speak, at their margins, upon their limits, so as to gain the power to transcend these analytical discourses and, true to its etymology (*monstrare*: to show), it points to utterances that lie beyond logic" (10). Michael Camille also underscores in *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* the dialogue between the marginal image and the text that it comments on, even as marginalia "pretends to avoid meaning" (9). As concerns my use of the idea of the frame as operating on a number of (even contradictory) levels, I have been inspired by Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin's book, *Framing Medieval Bodies*, in which they adopt a broad understanding of the idea of the frame. In the introduction to their work, Kay and Rubin explain that for them the frame designates the shared understanding or intellectual conceptualizations of the dominant discourses within a culture, as well as that which exhibits and displays the items held within it, even while it delimits and confines those items (3–4). Kay and Rubin stress moreover that "frames are not always very secure": "Frames may challenge and undermine one another," they state, and they emphasize the "inherently historical" aspect of the discursive or perceptual frame (4).

THE HYBRID FIGURE: A CHALLENGE TO THE "NATURAL" ORDER

In the *Roman de Silence* and *L'Enfant de sable* I have shown that the monstrous figures of the cross-dressed hybrids, Silence and Ahmed, often stand in contrast to other, more traditional narrative voices. We see this in the *Roman de Silence* when Nature and Nurture argue loudly and vehemently for an either/or sex-gender identity, while Silence incorporates an indeterminate identity with few difficulties, and in *L'Enfant de sable* when Ahmed's parents insist on a strict sex-based interpretation of appropriate bathing and behavior for the young Ahmed, in spite of his/her ambiguous identity. The reader is able to identify, throughout both texts, Silence's and Ahmed's opposition to and critique of the more dominant discourses, yet the two hero(ine)s' status as hybrid Others occurs only from within the perspective of the dominant culture. Even my own labeling of the two cross-dressed hero(ine)s as "hybrid" beings, composed of two (or more) otherwise discrete categories, depends, of course, on an initial acceptance of the traditional intellectual understanding of male and female biological or anatomical categories as discrete. Clearly, the terminology that we use and the manner in which we categorize and divide significant characteristics tell us much about our intellectual and cultural values.

Taxonomies of monsters, which have accompanied interest in the monstrous throughout the years, offer an especially revealing glimpse into those characteristics of monsters that a given culture considers significant. As taxonomies of monsters organize and categorize monstrous deformities, they also provide us with insights into the critical criteria of order within that culture. This again highlights the manner in which the hybrid figure, through his/her compound character, belies the necessary separation of categories and confronts the accepted hierarchy of certain categories over others. The seventh-century encyclopedist, Isidore de Seville, created one of the earliest and most influential medieval taxonomies of the monster. Isidore first undertook a taxonomical exploration of the normal human body, "part by part, organ by organ," and then created a roughly parallel description of all monstrous forms (Williams 107; *Etymologiae* II.38–54). Isidore

divides his taxonomy of monsters into twelve categories that became the general categories by which the medieval people organized the monstrous and remains our system of organization in the modern era (Williams 107).

According to Isidore's system, the following deformations of the normal form constitute monstrosity:

(1) hypertrophy of the body, (2) atrophy of the body, (3) excrescence of bodily parts, (4) superfluity of bodily parts, (5) deprivation of parts, (6) mixture of human and animal parts, (7) animal births by human women, (8) mislocation of organs or parts of the body, (9) disturbed growth (being born old), (10) composite beings, (11) hermaphrodites, (12) monstrous races. (Williams 107; *Etymologiae* II.52)

This categorization reasserts the natural order of things as it declares which combinations are acceptable and which combinations are not. Williams underscores the way in which such categorization reveals the values that were most significant to the era. As an example, he cites the category of monstrous deformity that is constituted by the lack of a coherent language. This, he states, demonstrates "a taxonomic principle behind which one may glimpse the importance attributed to language and the metaphysical role it plays in distinguishing normal human beings from other creatures" (15).

In turn, the medieval monster also acts as a critique of these metaphysical principles and of logical thinking. The hermaphrodite, for example—a bisexual figure common to literature and art from Plato through the Middle Ages, and sharing many characteristics with the cross-dresser—confronts and challenges the division between male and female and, by extension, contests the philosophical concept of unity. Williams highlights the manner in which hybrid or monstrous figures such as the hermaphrodite enter into a larger discourse during the Middle Ages that interrogates philosophical concepts through the overthrow of logical principles:

The speculative consideration of such ideas as simplicity and multiplicity, unity and individuation, similitude and difference, permanence and mutability, appears to have been carried out at various moments and to various degrees through a discourse characterized by a certain discursive deformation modeled on the inversion and reversal of the logical principles of conventional discourses. Thus the possible relation of the one to the many, explored with the tools of philosophy and theology, may also be suggested by the grotesque figure of the single body with three heads; the distinction between male and female, mediated by philosophical metaphors of unity, may be utterly dissolved in the sign of the monstrous hermaphrodite. (Williams 15)

Mircea Eliade, in his famous study of the androgyne, *The Two and the One*, emphasizes similarly the metaphysical symbolism of androgyny that Williams identifies in the medieval hermaphrodite, rather than the androgyne's sexuality. In general, according to Eliade, "androgyny signifies, not the existence of two sexes in one being, but rather the transcendence of the oppositions and metaphysical limitations that maleness and

femaleness signify" (Williams 170). Williams adds of the medieval period that "in the monster tradition the hermaphrodite is not a sexual, but an ontological phenomenon" (170). Certainly in the *Roman de Silence* also, as in *L'Enfant de sable*, Silence's and Ahmed's sex-gender indeterminacy plays a far more important role in the two narratives than does his/her sexuality, although the tension related to other characters' misreading of Silence's and Ahmed's sexuality acts to highlight further the way in which the two hero(ine)s' complicated and ambivalent gender runs contrary to traditional perceptions of the natural division of sexes.

It is important to emphasize, however, that for medieval people, the hybrid's challenge to the natural order does not indicate a flaw in that (divine) order itself, but rather in humankind's thinking or understanding of that order. Isidore himself, invoking the supremacy of divine will, explains the "real" existence of monstrous beings not as "a contradiction of nature but of human epistemological categories" (Williams 13): "Varro says that portents are things which seem to have been born contrary to nature, but in truth, they are not born contrary to nature, because they exist by the divine will, since the Creator's will is the nature of everything created.... A portent, therefore, does not arise contrary to nature, but contrary to what nature is understood to be" (Isidore, *Etymologiae* II.3.1–2; cited by Williams 12). Williams elaborates on the significance of Isidore's explanation, noting its central place in the medieval understanding of the monster:

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of this definition of the monster, not only because it was universally accepted in the Middle Ages and not only because by its acceptance and celebration of the monster, it sets this period apart from the periods that preceded and succeeded it but also because this definition elevates the monster in all its various manifestations—as the deformity and as the grotesque that arise from negation—to the level of conceptual sign. Isidore's understanding of nature, a nature which, as we see, includes the monster, is as 'the power of making and begetting.' This creative force, originating in God, extends to the human ability to know and to signify what it knows. The monster is part of this semiotic aspect of nature in that, unlike other signs that 'represent' the intelligible, it 'portends,' 'points to,' and *demonstrates*, to use Isidore's terms. (13, *italics original*)

Yet, although Isidore's taxonomy of monstrous forms provides a window into the medieval mind, permitting description and facilitating discussion of the medieval conception of the monster, Williams emphasizes that such a "structuring of disorder" is itself a contradiction (107–8). Whereas the monster queries traditional thinking and organization, we must fall back on the traditional organizational system in order to describe and discuss the monster. Williams adds that Pseudo-Dionysian thought anticipates this interrelationship of indeterminate and determinate thought, of the negative and the affirmative: "The fact that we cannot describe the monster without violating its essentially apophatic nature further demonstrates a dimension of negation first seen in Pseudo-Dionysian thought, that of the essential interpenetration of the negative and the affirmative" (107). However, as Williams also stresses, the negative

philosophical tradition's reliance on affirmative thinking is directed always toward a revelation of the inadequacies of this order:

To a degree the teratological order is a manipulation and commentary on the natural order, which it both affirms and negates; by making the natural order the subject of its exegesis and thus its very *raison d'être*, the teratological discourse demonstrates the indispensability of the natural, affirmative order and confesses its reliance upon it. But its commentary is aimed directly at exposing the cognitive limitations of this order as well as its arbitrary origins in human logic and language. (14–15)

In a similar vein, Michael Camille in *Image on the Edge* sets forth the interconnection between the medieval tradition of marvelous and seemingly incongruous manuscript marginalia with the highly structured nature of medieval society. As an example of the strict hierarchy and importance of placement and space that defined medieval society, Camille cites the following systems of medieval social categories or positions:

Such schemas included, in addition to the three orders of society—those who prayed, fought and laboured—the free and unfree, religious people and lay, city-dwellers and country-dwellers, and, of course, women and men. Although it lacked our predominant dichotomy of public versus private, the medieval organization of space was no less territorial. In the fields, strips marked off each peasant's holdings, while in towns and cities every street and enclave, each market and waterway, came under the control of particular ecclesiastical or secular lords. The thirteenth century was precisely the period of arable expansion that reclaimed much marginal land for enclosure to increase seignorial revenues. This control and codification of space represented by the labelled territories of the centrifugal circular World Map created, of necessity, a space for ejecting the undesirable—the banished, outlawed, leprous, scabrous outcasts of society. (16)

The highly structured nature of medieval society created unlimited possibilities for artistic and literary opposition: “The medieval image-world was, like medieval life itself, rigidly structured and hierarchical. For this reason, resisting, ridiculing, overturning and inverting it was not only possible, it was limitless. Every model had its opposite, inverse antimodel” (Camille 26). Camille repeats, as does Williams, that the dominant structure and its anti-models thereby support and define one another: “The center is...dependent on the margins for its continued existence” (10).

In modern times, especially following Foucault, we again find a radical questioning of the accepted natural order. This questioning has brought the artistic depiction and academic study of hybrids, monsters and wonders from the margins, where they had been relegated following their demotion as figures of serious interest, to the center. We are now witnesses to a cultural revival of the monstrous figure, not only in France but throughout contemporary Western culture. Daston and Park comment on this revival: “Wonder and wonders have risen to prominence on a wave of suspicion and self-doubt

concerning the standards and sensibilities that had long excluded them (and much else) from respectable intellectual endeavors" (10). Hans Berthens discusses more generally in *The Idea of Postmodernism* the suspicion and doubt concerning long-held intellectual and aesthetic standards, which he refers to as "a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real" (11). "No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, moral, or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted," Berthens states (11). Jim Collins notes also in *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Postmodernism* that in the face of this crisis of traditional culture and representation, narrative styles, themes and subjects long-considered "low" or popular culture now figure among the central components of contemporary postmodern literature, art, film and architecture: "We need to see popular culture and postmodernism as a continuum because both reflect and produce the same cultural perspective—that 'culture' no longer can be conceived as a Grand Hotel, as a totalizable system that somehow orchestrates all cultural production and reception according to one master system" (xiii). Perhaps the Grand Hotel still exists, but it no longer represents a safe zone isolated from the threat of the popular—monsters, hybrids and wonders have now moved in.

Drawing on traditional discourses, postmodern works typically combine and juxtapose motifs and styles in an often conflicting manner. This does not signify, however, that cultural production has become meaningless, as Collins, citing Charles Jencks, emphasizes: "The present condition of culture ...demands a juxtaposition of conflicting ideologies, not a resolution' (Jencks, *The Language of Postmodern Architecture* 163). The lack of resolution becomes not a 'non-style,' but the only accurate way to reflect the cultural conflicts which have produced these texts" (137). Furthermore, successful postmodern artists employ specific stylistic contrasts with a distinct purpose in mind: "The postmodernist aim, then, is not haphazard 'pastiche,' motivated only by perversity, but specific juxtapositions for particular purposes" (Collins 138). For Collins, it is this exploitation of the question of styles in the postmodern work that most clearly sets apart postmodernism from modernism:

The [postmodern] work juxtaposes disparate styles and foregrounds the unresolvable tensions between them, but also unifies these juxtapositions around a well-defined theme.... Where Modernism sought to replace outmoded styles entirely with another 'radical' one, postmodern texts... emphasize the question of style itself as a way of coming to terms with the traditions of the past as well as the discursive and ideological conflicts in the present. (138)

Manipulating and juxtaposing past styles around central themes, postmodern artists come to terms with present conflicts and tensions while drawing into question the very notion of style itself.

At the same time that postmodern artists are exploiting past motifs and styles to express contemporary concerns and critical thinkers are challenging traditional intellectual hierarchies, poststructuralist theory in particular has drawn attention to the fallacy of totalizing concepts such as *the* body, in the singular. Highlighting a crucial difference in perspective between poststructuralist and traditional psychoanalytical theorists, Kay and Rubin in the introduction to *Framing Medieval Bodies* observe that the

proponents of traditional psychoanalysis “seek to impose a single body image: one organized around the phallus, or its lack” (3):

From within a predominantly structuralist framework, Mary Douglas asserted, at the beginning of *Natural Symbols*, that the body is something we all have in common. If so, it is only in the sense of the joke about the British and Americans being separated by a common language.... Feminist poststructuralists in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world have voiced a united attack on the traditional concept of the *body* in the singular as a cover for masculinist privileging of the male embodied subject. (3, italics original)

Kay and Rubin add that one of the important lessons of poststructuralism is that bodies are multiple and are far from “natural”: “Thus another intellectual gain of the poststructuralist enterprise has been the recognition of the way *bodies* (in the plural) are constructed discursively, in the symbolic order” (3, italics original).

THE LITERARY HYBRID AS CULTURAL METAPHOR

The cross-dressed hybrid figure thereby asserts him/herself as a central figure in both his/her symbolic challenge to the totalizing ideology of *the* [male] body and in the contemporary reappropriation of the previously marginal. The hybrid figure embodies, literally, the multiple bodies that poststructuralist thinking hypothesizes, and the cross-dressed hybrid stands as a particularly attractive figure, from a critical point of view, in his/her challenge to a totalizing, male-centered ideology. As the cross-dresser contests previous assumptions of the way in which human experience is “refracted through gender,” from a psychoanalytic perspective s/he also further destabilizes “the category of the centered person” (terminology from Kay and Rubin, 3).

But whereas the questioning of order and hierarchies has stimulated contemporary interest in the marginal, the monstrous hybrid no longer in and of itself poses a significant challenge to natural order or to the social structure. That is, in general, modern people no longer believe in the literal manifestation of the fantastic figures that they represent in literature and art. “When hundreds of television viewers discerned the face of Jesus in a broadcast photograph of nebula,” Daston and Park note, “no one anticipated riots” (365). Daston and Park thus describe the contemporary interest in natural wonders in particular as diverting and nonthreatening:

In some sense we live in a world saturated with wonders. The cultivated admire the wonders displayed in science museums and explained in books: volcanic eruptions, huge geodes, meteor showers, magnetism. The not-so-cultivated admire the wonders reported in the *Weekly World News*: monstrous births, UFO’s, prodigious feasts and fasts. Depending on the company they keep, some wonders are respectable and others are disreputable; but none threatens the order of nature and society. Scientists

have yet to explain many, perhaps most, wonders, but they subscribe to an ontology guaranteeing that all are in principle explicable. (365)

Similarly, even while critical thinkers question the traditions of intellectual order and propriety, and undertake the study of subjects that only recently would have been dismissed by serious “scientific” thinkers as popular, frivolous, superstitious or insignificant, a scientific perspective still informs strongly the framework of our interrogations. Furthermore, the predominantly ironic, critical perspective typical of contemporary readers and thinkers restrains us from a naïve belief in or overenthusiasm for the appearance of the monstrous or wondrous. Our interest in such marvels remains always at a distance.

However, whereas the hybrid stands now as a socially nonthreatening figure, and, due to its relatively recent acceptance as a topic of serious academic study, as a somewhat amusing and novel subject, the ubiquitousness of the hybrid figure in contemporary French literature and art bears witness to a culturally significant reoccurrence of the fascination with hybridism developed in the Middle Ages. In contemporary times, as in medieval, the interest in hybridism and monstrosity indicates an often dramatic and sensational aesthetic sensibility, as it points also toward a larger dissatisfaction with traditional, affirmative, logical or scientific discourses. The hybrid figure in medieval and contemporary French literature brings together in a vivid fashion otherwise disparate categories and characteristics, thereby challenging the traditionally accepted natural order. The fantastic nature of the monstrous hybrid also upsets rational, logical thinking as it “demonstrates” its complex signification, rather than attempting to represent the real world. The hybrid figure thus underscores or frames a concern with totalizing, master discourses or perspectives and a questioning of a direct, “natural,” and knowable relation of the sign to the signified. Moreover, the narrative openendedness and indeterminacy of these texts highlights as well the repeated deferral of authoritative meaning. The resulting instability and undecidability reveal a confrontation with the concepts of continuity and unity that expresses on the narrative level an awareness of the multiple and unfixed nature of knowledge and experience which the hybrid figure embodies on the physical level.

The Chicano scholar and literary critic, José David Saldívar, has extended the idea of cultural and racial blending or hybridism to the production of theory itself, emphasizing the border as the site in which various discourses meet and merge: “Theory is now written not from a condition of critical ‘distance,’ but rather from a place of hybridism and *betweenness* in our global Borderlands” (153, *italics original*). Saldívar’s comment certainly could also designate the central position of the hybrid figure in medieval and modern French literature. In this sense, the hybrid functions not only as a character within these texts but as a metaphor for cultural fluidity, fusion and complexity that highlights discursive and perceptual interrogations. Or, borrowing Robert Neustadt’s terminology from his study of postmodern positions, the hybrid is a place of cultural, epistemological and semiotic “(con)fusion.”¹

Of course, as I have noted previously, the specific “interrogations” of the medieval and modern periods are not precisely equivalent. Sturges has argued emphatically against an overly simplistic equation of medieval and contemporary concerns, yet he concludes by comparing the two while making concessions for historical specifications:

Although medieval thinkers would not, like Derrida, have denied the 'transcendental signified' in favor of an endless chain of signifiers, some of them were willing to bracket the question of the divine control of human signification, with results that may seem startlingly familiar to a late twentieth-century reader. Indeed, the reader's creation of meaning, recently rediscovered by such theorists as Iser, would not have surprised medieval writers like Marie de France or Chaucer, who ask explicitly for such participation, or like Machaut or Malory, who make it possible even without directly requesting it. (220)

Gellrich, Sturges, Williams, and others have also pointed out in different ways and to different ends, that the confrontation and competition between the affirmative and negative philosophical traditions, or between determinate and indeterminate modes of thought, that take place in Western Europe especially between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries lead ultimately to the "victory" of the affirmative tradition and of determinate thinking. Modern French literature, on the other hand, remains deeply embedded in the contemporary "crisis of representation." An important continuation to this study would be to examine in a much more detailed fashion the differences between medieval and modern indeterminacy, rather than simply highlighting their similarities. This would surely lead to a much more nuanced understanding of narrative within the two periods and of the position of literary texts within larger cultural preoccupations.

That we do encounter such profound similarities in the form and content of medieval and modern French narrative, however, reveals deep commonalities between these two periods often seen as opposites. Moving from the margins to the center and back again, the hybrid figure most particularly epitomizes these shared concerns through the hybrid's complex, composite and ultimately undecidable identity. The hybrid figure frames our attraction to spectacular physical and narrative juxtapositions as it forms the context for questions of larger epistemological consideration. In spite of its monstrosity and because of it, the hybrid figure indicates a cultural frustration with an overreliance on reason and the limitations of an unambiguous resolution.

Notes

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1. As examples of the latter, Eco mentions Pousseur's musical composition, *Scambi*, and Mallarmé's immense poetic production, *Livre* (12).
2. Williams uses this term to refer to the monster's role in demonology and as a vehicle for irony. He thereby differentiates between recusative, ironic negativity and the negative philosophical and theological tradition of Pseudo-Dionysius (16).
3. As examples of this approach, Williams cites T.Tindall Wildridge, *The Grotesque in Church Art* (London: William Andrews & Co., 1899, Reprint, Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., 1969); Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Gloucester, MA: P.Smith, 1968); and Howard Daniel, *Devils, Monsters, and Nightmares: An Introduction to the Grotesque and Fantastic in Art* (London: Warburg Institute, 1969).
4. The exact dates of the life of Pseudo-Dionysius are unknown, as is his identity. Some sources say that he lived during the sixth century. It was John Scotus Eriugena who translated the Areopagite in the ninth century, making the philosophical work of Pseudo-Dionysius available to the West.
5. In his translation of the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, Eriugena considerably extended the theory of the monstrous from the original:

It was, in fact, in the act of translating the Areopagite that Eriugena was able to develop far more than had his source a theory of teratological imagery, thereby transforming Dionysius's dyadic system of representation, based on similar and dissimilar images, into a more typically Neoplatonic triadic system based on similar, dissimilar, and *monstrous*. In addition, in his own exegesis Eriugena demonstrates the utility of the concept of the monstrous through his development of two kinds of allegory: allegory *facti et dicti* and allegory *dicti non (autem) facti*. The first is discourse that derives its images from nature and history; the second, a purely spiritual discourse, contradicts, deforms, and transcends nature and mundane reality so as to reveal an extralogical, extraempirical truth. (Williams 10, italics original)

6. Williams refers to anthropomorphism as the generalized medieval perspective "that conceives of the human intellect as remaking in its own image, at least partially, all of the objects of knowledge it seeks to understand" (5). He notes that the *via negativa* entails a correction of this "misrepresentation": "The corrective to this process of 'misrepresenting' the intelligible was borrowed from the originally theological method of Pseudo-Dionysius and involved the

progressive negation of logical affirmations about the world and the real" (Williams 5). See, for example, Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names* (588B) in which Pseudo-Dionysius warns explicitly of the dangers of anthropomorphic representations and thinking (Williams 5).

7. In the Middle Ages, the nominalist/realist controversy vehicles such a crisis.

8. Derrida's "project" to which Sturges refers is the advent of writing as free play. Sturges cites in particular the "messianic" opening chapter of *Of Grammatology*:

There is not a single signified that escapes, even if recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language. The advent of writing is the advent of this play: today such a play is coming into its own, effacing the limit starting from which one had thought to regulate the circulation of signs, drawing along with it all the reassuring signifieds, reducing all the strongholds, all the out-of-bounds shelters that watched over the field of language. (Sturges 2; Derrida *Of Grammatology* 7)

9. See Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston, "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England," *Past and Present* 92 (1981), 20–54. Daston and Park add that although there were virtually no works on monsters in English, the French had already initiated the new intellectual wave: "As usual, the French were in the vanguard, especially Georges Canguilhem, *La Connaissance de la vie* (Paris: Librairie Vrin, 1965), Jean Céard's remarkable edition of Ambroise Paré, *Des monstres et prodiges* [1573] (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1971), and his *La Nature et les prodiges: L'Insolite au XVIe siècle en France* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977)" (*Wonders* 373 n. 2). Daston and Park have continued to pursue their interest in monsters, while working in their separate fields, and have published such articles as: "Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1991):93–124, and "Hermaphrodites in Renaissance France," *Critical Matrix* 1 (1985):1–19.

10. Daston and Parks provide an short etymology of vocabulary of wonder:

In Latin, the emotion itself was called *admiratio* and the objects, *mirabilia*, *miracula*, or occasionally *ammiranda*. These terms, like the verb *miror* and the adjective *mirus*, seem to have their roots in an Indo-European word for 'smile.' (The Greek *thauma*, on the other hand, found its origin in a verb 'to see.') The etymological ties between wonder and smiling persisted in the romance languages (*merveille* in French, *meraviglia* in Italian, *marvel* in English from c. 1300). (16)

11. Williams, however, who identifies the beginning of the Renaissance, rather than the Enlightenment, as the critical moment in the change of attitude toward monsters, has quite a different reading on Bacon's inclusion of a history of marvels into a newly reconfigured field of natural philosophy. Rather than viewing Bacon's proposal as merely "pro-marvels" or "pro-monsters," Williams points out that Bacon now clearly situates the monstrous within the world of "nature," which according to the new "scientific" thinking of the era, is a "force that, though enormous, is nevertheless within the intellectual containment of the human mind" (Williams 327). Accordingly, whereas Paré intermixed divine and natural causes of deformity in his treatise, Bacon strictly divided the two. For this reason, Williams identifies Bacon as "a particularly important transitional figure in the changing mentality" and as instrumental in the ultimate "exile" of the monster (328).

12. Daston and Park note that unsigned articles in the *Encyclopédie* were very often written by Diderot (439 n. 1).

13. Daston and Park provide examples of such popular interest in marvels in the eighteenth century and refer interested readers to a number of texts for additional information:

Fairs and coffeehouses still showed monsters; cabinets still displayed curiosities; the almanacs and gazettes reported bizarre weather, talking dogs, and balloon flights; savants demonstrated the wonders of electricity and luminescence; provincial academies pursued preternatural history; and the popular French series of volumes in the Bibliothèque Bleue entertained their readers with wondrous stories. (329)

For further reading, see Daston and Park, 439 n. 2.

14. Huet points out that etymological dictionaries have adopted another tradition, tracing the word “monster” to *monere*, to warn, and thereby “associating even more closely the abnormal birth with the prophetic vision of impending disaster” (6).
15. Aristotle associates the female and the monstrous in Book Four of *Generation of Animals*:

Anyone who does not take after his parents is really in a way a monstrosity, since in these cases Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though this indeed is a necessity required by Nature, since the race of creatures which are separated into male and female has got to be kept in being.... As for monstrosities, they are not necessary so far as the purposive or final case is concerned, yet *per accidens*. (Cited by Huet, 3; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), IV, iii, 401–403).

For additional information on Aristotle’s theory and its influence, Huet refers the reader to: Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959), 37–60; and Jacques Roger, *Les sciences de la vie dans la pensée française du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), 63–91) (Huet 271 n. 3).

16. Aristotle was distinctly disturbed by this “false resemblance”:

It is not easy, by stating a single mode of cause, to explain...why sometimes the offspring is a human being yet bears no resemblance to any ancestor, sometimes it has reached such a point that in the end it no longer has the appearance of a human being at all, but that of an animal only—it belongs to the class of monstrosities, as it is called. And indeed this is what comes next to be treated...the cause of monstrosities, for in the end, when the movements (that came from the male) relapse and the material (that came from the female) does not get mastered, what remains is that which is most ‘general,’ and this is the (merely) ‘animal.’ People say that the offspring which is formed has the head of a ram or an ox; similarly with other creatures, that one has the head of another, e.g., a calf has a child’s head or a sheep an ox’s head. The occurrence of all these things is due to the causes I have named; at the same time, *in no case are they what they are alleged to*

be, but resemblances only, and this of course comes about even when there is no deformation involved. (Cited by Huet, 4; Aristotle IV, iii, 417–19; emphasis added by Huet)

17. The citation attributed to Empedocles is quoted in Jean Rostand, *La formation de l'être, histoire des idées sur la génération* (Paris: Hachette, 1930) 38. The translation of the citation is Marie-Hélène Huet's. Huet comments on the influence of Empedocles's idea in Western Europe, noting that it was probably disseminated in the Renaissance through Amyot's translation of Plutarch. Numerous treatises on generation and "almost all" the essays on progeny and monstrosity also mention his idea (Huet 271 n. 5).
18. Lee Patterson underscores in "On the Margin" the prevalence of this analytical approach which relates late Antiquity and the Renaissance to Modernism, while overlooking the Middle Ages. As concerns Huet's reading of the role of the maternal imagination in the creation of the monstrous child, such an historical division may be well founded. Nonetheless, she does not address the medieval monster.
19. Williams emphasizes the importance of the philosophy of Pseudo-Dionysius to medieval thinkers:

Denys's works were the subject of study and formal commentary by virtually every major mediaeval thinker from John of Scythopolis (sixth century) in the Byzantine tradition and John Scotus Eriugena, Denys's translator in the West, as well as Thomas Aquinas eight hundred years later, throughout whose work he is cited, after Aristotle, more than any other authority. (23)

Yet, Williams notes that in spite of the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius, there does not exist a single, identifiable "Dionysian tradition":

Curiously, however, one cannot point to any complete and lasting Dionysian 'tradition' in the West, partly because Dionysianism is not a theology in the Thomistic sense, much less a philosophy in the Greek sense. It is closer to a mystical program centered on the idea of personal conversion triggered by a profound metalinguistic understanding of the world and of God. Nevertheless, Denys's theoretical writings were a mine of ideas and perceptions for the Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, and none abstained from employing them in his own writings. However, each thinker who used Denys's ideas modified them in some way to suit another—not always congenial—system. (23)

See *Deformed Discourse*, page 24, for an elaboration of the modifications made by Eriugena and others.

20. See Jean Céard, ed. and intro., *Des monstres et prodiges* (Geneva: Droz, 1971).
21. See Claude Stephen Le Paumier, *Ambroise Paré d'après de nouveaux documents découverts aux archives nationales* (Paris: Charavay Frères, 1884).
22. Williams comments pointedly on Paré's naïveté:

The inability of Paré to understand why he should be singled out for condemnation and ridiculed simply for having continued in a path trod by Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, and others held eminent even by his

- attackers is rooted in a kind of naïvety so complete that it cannot recognize scandal even when it is itself the origin of that scandal. (326)
23. For example: Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1972); Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982); Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York: Boni, 1935); William Kerrigan and Gordon Braden, *The Idea of the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1989); Catherine Belsey, *John Milton: Language, Gender, Power* (New York: Blackwell, 1988). All discussed by Patterson, 92–96.
 24. For a striking example of a popular work, see: William Raymond Manchester, *A World Lit Only By Fire, The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance: Portrait of an Age* (Boston: Little Brown, 1992).
 25. Raymond and Compère provide extensive examples and brief analyses of modern and contemporary writers of the fantastic. See *Les Maîtres du fantastique en littérature*, especially pages 147–244.
 26. A considerable number of Maghreb writers treat hybrid themes, often also featuring characters who are physically hybrid or demonstrate their “dual nature” in some physical way. See Jean Déjeux, *Maghreb littératures de langue française*.
 27. Raymond and Compère note that *Angoisse* often re-examines classical themes and that literature of high quality appears alongside lesser works: “Éditée par les éditions Fleuve noir, *Angoisse* est la plus populaire des collections fantastiques françaises. Ecrits par des auteurs différents, les ouvrages présentent la caractéristique commune de tourner autour des thèmes traditionnels: vampire, incarnation, dédoublement, objets maléfiques. Les oeuvres médiocres y voisinent avec les romans réussis” (215).
 28. *Guillaume de Palerne. Roman du XIII^e siècle*, ed. and intro. Alexandre Micha (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1990). Skeat dates the original manuscript of *Guillaume de Palerne* to 1178–1200. Summers notes in *The Werewolf* that the tale of *Guillaume de Palerne* was “immensely popular” during the Middle Ages. By about 1350, Sir Humphrey de Bohun commanded a translation of the romance into English. It was entitled *The Romance of William of Palerne* or *William and the Werewolf* (*The Romance of William of Palerne*, ed. W.W. Skeat, Early English Text Society, 1867). At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Old French poem was re-written in French prose (Summers 220).
 29. Mohammed Dib, *Le Sommeil d’Eve* (Paris: Sinbad, 1989). Mohammed Dib was born in Algeria but has lived in France for many years. He is the author of numerous novels and two collections of short stories. With his novel, *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962), published the same year that Algeria achieved independence from France, Dib established himself as a master of “the new narrative form” and as an *écrivain public*—an author who writes as the witness to contemporary events: “Dib...excellait dans son roman hallucinant, fantasmagorique et poétique à rendre compte de la grande destruction et du grand renouvellement en cours” (Déjeux, *Maghreb littératures* 41). Dib has received a number of literary awards for his work, such as Le prix Fénéron (1953), Le prix de l’Afrique méditerranéenne (1978), and Le grand prix biennal des littératures d’expression française attribué par la Fédération internationale des écrivains de langue française (1988).
 30. Summers, citing Littré, provides an etymology of the French term *loup-garou*, noting that it incorporates both a French and a German word meaning “wolf” (Summers 10; Littré 350). E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, tome ii, Première partie, 1869.
 31. Whereas the werewolves in *Le Guillaume de Palerne* and *Le Sommeil d’Eve* do not undergo the wounding that is traditional in werewolf legends, in other werewolf tales this wound further emphasizes the continuity of the werewolf’s human nature in spite of his appearances. Traditionally, a werewolf may be transformed back into his human body if he

- is killed or wounded while still a wolf. The wound that he received to his wolf body, however, will remain on his human body.
32. Claude Lecouteux points out in *Fées, sorcières et loup-garous au moyen âge* that true metamorphosis is rare in French medieval works. More often, shapeshifting and transformations are attributed to magical spells and charms, as is the case in *Guillaume de Palerne* wherein Brande casts a spell on Alphons that transforms him into a werewolf. Other examples of magical transformations include Renaut de Beaujeu's *Le Bel inconnu*, in which the wizard Mabon transforms *la belle Blonde Esmerée* into a *vouivre*, and the romance *Merlin* in which the wizard Merlin transforms the body of Roi Uter into that of Baron Jordain, whose wife the king covets (Lecouteux 141). A medieval example of human metamorphosis into werewolf that occurs without obvious magical intervention is Marie de France's *lai*, "Bisclavret."
 33. This is also true of "Bisclavret."
 34. Another noteworthy modern French retelling of the werewolf legend is the short story, "Le Gâloup" by Claude Seignolle (in *Le Diable en sabots*), in which the author tells the tale of a werewolf from the point of view of the werewolf himself. Seignolle has written a number of works based on traditional popular tales. He often sets his stories in realistic settings, exploring the theme of the devil and of diabolic possession through the lives of simple, "natural" people who are sensitive to mysteries (Raymond and Compère 214).
 35. *Les Terrasses d'Orsol*, the first part of Dib's Nordic trilogy, also examines the subject of monsters. In this novel, in which Dib pursues an "écriture de vision," a civil servant named Orsol ("Or et soleil, hors sol"), has been sent off to an isolated city in the North. He carries the "curse of the sun" ("la malediction du soleil") and suffers from amnesia. He discovers *une fosse de monstres*, meets a beautiful, enigmatic woman, and, by the end of his adventure, has forgotten both his name and his country. Déjeux refers to this novel as "le plus inquiétant de toute l'oeuvre de Dib" in its consideration of the price of freedom and of truth (Déjeux, *Maghreb littéraires* 371).
 36. Jean d'Arras, *Mélusine, Roman du XIVe siècle*, ed. Louis Stouff (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974). The romance was originally written by Jean d'Arras between 1392–93 (Kappler 156). Stouff notes that the various manuscripts of the romance present innumerable differences, which he attributes to its tremendous popularity in the Middle Ages, and hence to its wide diffusion (viii). By about 1500, an English translation of *Mélusine* was published, based on the 1478 manuscript. The original French romance *Mélusine* was commissioned of Jean d'Arras by the Duc de Berry et d'Auvergne (1340–1418) and his sister Marie, Duchesse de Bar, in order to record their family history and legitimize their claim to their ancestral home of Lusignan. By the time of their request, Jean d'Arras was already a famous writer and Marie's favorite poet. Since Jean d'Arras was from Picardy, he knew little about the true history of Poitou (Gilbert 55). While writing his romance, Jean consulted the legend of Mélusine in the works of Gervais de Tillbury (*Les Loisirs des Merveilles*) and Vincent de Beauvais (*Le Speculum maiior*) (Kappler 156; Lecouteux, *Mélusine* 15). Max Gilbert explains that, according to legend, the Fairy Mélusine lived in the seventh or eighth centuries, and had built the castle of Lusignan. She is thus often referred to as "the mother of the Lusignans," or Mère-Lusine (Gilbert 54–55).
 37. Marcel Aymé, *La Vouivre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945). Aymé (1902–67) was the author of numerous novels, collections of short stories and plays, in addition to *La Vouivre* (first published in 1943). Aymé's work is known for its juxtaposing of realistic and supernatural effects, as Bernard Clavel notes: "Il nous entraîne en un fabuleux univers où le réel côtoie l'imaginaire le plus débridé" (Raymond and Compère 160). Raymond and Compère characterize Aymé as an "observateur ironique des moeurs de ses contemporains" and refer to *La Vouivre* as a "roman étrange" (160). Aymé received the Prix Renaudot for *La Table-aux-Crevés*. For other studies of modern works that demonstrate the influence of the serpent-woman tradition, see, for example: Harry A.Senn, "Proust and *Mélusine*: From Fairy Magic

- to Personal Mythology,” *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 43:3–4, 267–275; and Maria Isabel Pires de Lima, “Nadja: Entre Melusina e Medusa,” *Coloquio Letras* 72:41–50.
38. Mélusine repeats her pledge to help Remondin and to bring him wealth and honor, saying first: “Par Dieu, Remondin, je suiz, aprez Dieu, celle qui te puet plus aidier et avancier en ce mortel monde, en tes adversitez, et ton malefice revertir en bien” (25). She reiterates shortly thereafter, “Et je vous jure, par le peril de l’ame de moy, que jamais celui jour je ne feray ja chose qui vous puist estre atournee fors a toute honneur. Et celui jour ne feray que penser par quelle voye je pourray mieulx accroistre en haulte valeur vous et vostre estat” (26). After their marriage, she fulfills her promise.
 39. More precisely, the narrator describes the physical deformities of the first eight sons, but does not mention the existence (or lack) of marks on the last two who are still infants when Mélusine is forced to flee her home and family (when Remondin breaks his promise to her by denouncing her serpent-nature in the presence of others). Even after she has flown away, however, Mélusine returns to their nursery under cover of night to nurse and care for her young sons. This maternal devotion has contributed strongly to Mélusine’s enduring popularity, according to several scholars.
 40. The cause of Remondin’s angry outburst is the death of their seventh son, Fromont. Fromont had been particularly religious during his childhood and youth, and had asked his parents’ permission to enter the monastery of Malleres as a monk. They gave him their blessing and he entered the cloister. Fromont’s older brother, Geoffrey la Grande Dent, however, does not share his parents’ point of view. When he returns home after having defeated the giant Gardon (who had attempted to take possession of Remondin’s land), and learns of Fromont’s decision, he becomes furious. He believes that his brother’s cloistering dishonors the entire family, that the family could have provided Fromont with a fief of his own instead, and that the monks are influencing Fromont for their own gain. Geoffrey la Grande Dent travels to Malleres and, in a mad rage, locks all of the one hundred monks, including Fromont, inside the chapel of the Abbaye de Malleres and sets fire to it. The chapel burns to the ground, killing all within. After Remondin hears the news of the fire and of the death of his son, he turns angrily on Mélusine, blaming her for the incident: “Hee, tres faulse serpente, par Dieu, ne toy ne tes fais ne sont que fantosme, ne ja hoir que tu ayes porté ne vendra a bon chief en la fin” (255). Remondin immediately regrets his outburst, but it is too late. Witnesses have heard Remondin reveal Mélusine’s secret just as she entered his room with her attendants—“bien acompaigne de dames et de damoiselles et de barons du pays” (254). Mélusine is so distraught that she loses consciousness. Upon awakening, she laments the loss that each son will suffer, offers a last piece of advice to her husband regarding the raising of their sons, and then flies away out a window, having grown the wings of a flying serpent or dragon.
 41. Citing Gordon Leff’s *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), Emerick notes that pagan beliefs “resurfaced” in the fourteenth century: “Leff’s comprehensive study of the breakdown of the medieval world view in the fourteenth century makes a strong case for a pluralistic religious atmosphere during that period that allowed the surfacing of these multiple religious theories and practices previously submerged by the stronger wave of Catholic power” (74).
 42. Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lion*, ed. and trans. William W. Kibler (New York and London: Garland, 1985). Chrétien de Troyes wrote *Yvain* in the second half of the twelfth century, after writing the romances *Erec et Enide*, *Cligés*, and perhaps *Lancelot, ou Le Chevalier de la charrete*. Following *Yvain*, Chrétien also wrote the romance *Le Roman de Perceval ou, Le Conte du Graal*. He also authored two lyric poems in the courtly manner, and, according to Maurice Wilmotte and others, is the author of the hagiographic romance *Guillaume d’Angleterre* (Wilmotte, ed., *Guillaume d’Angleterre*, *Classiques français du moyen âge* [Paris: Champion, 1927] 55). Two other works to which Chrétien refers in the opening lines of *Cligés*, *Les Comandemanz d’Ovide* and *Le Mors de l’espaule*, have been lost. Chrétien was associated with the court of Marie de Champagne and, after her husband’s

death, with the court of Philippe d'Alsace, a cousin of Marie's (Kibler xv). Chrétien is known particularly for his mastery of the octosyllabic rhymed couplet, his emphasis on the love interest in his stories, and his new use of the *matière de Bretagne* (Kibler xviii–xxi). He is “widely recognized as one of the greatest writers of the French Middle Ages and the father of the Arthurian romance” and *Yvain* is often referred to as “his most perfect romance” (Kibler xiii).

43. Yann Queffélec, *Les Noces barbares* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985). Queffélec is a literary critic for *Le Nouvel Observateur*. He has published a biography of Bela Bartok, a successful first novel, *Le Charme noir*, followed by *Les Noces barbares* for which he received the esteemed Prix Goncourt in 1985. Côté states that “several critics” consider *Le Maître des chimères* (1990) Queffélec's best novel to date. In his novels, Queffélec most often develops themes that revolve around tormented family dramas. Côté notes that Queffélec clearly “revels in the portrayal of pathologies” (343). In *Prends garde au loup*, Queffélec further develops the idea of hybridism and metamorphosis as the main character, Toni, imagines that his cousin, Maï, mutates into a flame, a bee, and a violin.
44. See John G. Burke, “The Wild Man's Pedigree,” for a study of the scientific errors and biases that have become incorporated in the wild man myth. (Burke, “The Wild Man's Pedigree,” *The Wild Man Within* 259–80).
45. Bernheimer finds echoes of the bestial but friendly wild man who greets Calogrenant in several other French medieval romances, including “the ugly but utterly harmless creature whom Aucassin meets on the way to his reunion with Nicolette”; “the creature that appears under the allegorical name of ‘Danger’ in the ‘Roman de la Rose’; and Merlin in a disguise of “extravagant ugliness” in the “Roman d'Artus” (29). In the final episode of the *Roman de Silence*, Merlin also disguises himself as a similarly ugly but harmless wild man. Bernheimer contrasts the “ironic primitivism” of Chrétien's *Yvain* with later medieval depictions of the wild man in which his attachment to the court of a lady has a civilizing and humanizing effect on his behavior. We see examples of such “humanized” wild men in Chrétien's *Perceval* and in *La Mule sans Frain* by Païens de Maisières, Bernheimer notes (29).
46. Bartra elaborates on the theme of the lovemad knight, expanding the list to include Perceval, Pamphilus, Grimante, Orlando and Arnalte, in addition to Tristan and Lancelot. Of *Yvain*, Bartra says that he is “the most characteristic and ancient of them all” (133).

CHAPTER 2.

PASSING FOR TRUE

1. *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993). The references that I provide refer to page numbers from Mandelbaum's edition since the English translation does not correspond to the original Latin in terms of line numbers.
2. Heldris de Cornuälle, *Le Roman de Silence*, ed. Lewis Thorpe (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1972). Heldris states his name in the first line of the romance: “[M]aistres Heldris de Cornuälle/Escrest ces viers trestolt a talle” (1–2), and again near the end of the poem (6682–4), but does not supply other information concerning his identity. Lewis Thorpe has attempted to create a portrait of the author based on episodes in the romance itself, such as his familiarity with courtly life and his legal knowledge, as well as the place names that he cites. Thorpe was unable, however, to arrive at a specific identity. Heinrich Gelzer hypothesized in his 1927 article, “Der Silenceroman von Heldris de Cornualle” that the name “Master Heldris” could have been an imaginary name, chosen from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* because of its reference to Cornwall, in an effort to please a patron, perhaps Richard of Cornwall (99). Sarah Roche-Mahdi, in the introduction to her translation of the romance, suggests alternatively that the author could have chosen a

- fictitious name in an attempt to disguise *her* own identity as a “transvestite she” (xi). Scholars have found no reference to the story, or its author, in later medieval works (Thorpe 12). Recently, however, the “modernity” of the *Roman de Silence* has caught the attention of a number of scholars. F.Regina Psaki characterizes studies of *Silence* as falling into “two main currents”: “the sociological and the feminist” (“Introduction,” *Arthuriana* 3). In my own work, I have particularly appreciated Michele Perret’s article, “Travesties et transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchandine” (1985), Kate Mason Cooper’s “Elle and L: Sexualized Textuality in the *Roman de Silence*” (1985), Peter Allen’s “The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing, and *Le Roman de Silence*” (1989), Psaki’s preface to her translation into English of the *Roman de Silence* (1991), Edward J. Gallagher’s “The Modernity of *Le Roman de Silence*” (1992), Peggy McCracken’s “The Boy Who Was a Girl: Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*” (1995) and Lorraine Kochanske Stock’s “The Importance of Being Gender ‘Stable’: Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman de Silence*” (1997). These scholars have underscored aspects of the romance’s privileging of linguistic and generic ambiguity. There are two translations of the romance into English, by F.Regina Psaki and by Sarah Roche-Mahdi. Roche-Mahdi has re-edited the Old French, alongside her English translation. Both translations include an introduction and notes: *Le Roman de Silence*, Trans. Regina Psaki, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Vol. 63 Series B (New York: Garland, 1991). *Silence. A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*, Ed. and trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi, Medieval Texts and Studies: No. 10 (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992).
3. Tahar Ben Jelloun, *L’Enfant de sable* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985). Tahar Ben Jelloun is a Francophone Moroccan author. He has written numerous essays, short stories, plays and novels, and has written and edited several collections of poems. *L’Enfant de sable* is his sixth novel. Many scholars of *L’Enfant de sable* have focused on the intersection between the ethno-political aspect of the novel and its narrative opacity. See, for example, John D.Erickson, “Femme voilée, récit voilé” and “Writing Double: Politics and the African Narrative of French Expression”; Christopher Gibbins, “Dismantling the Maghreb: Contemporary Moroccan Writing and Islamic Discursivity”; Marc Gontard, “Effets de métissage dans la littérature marocaine de langue française”; Lisa Lowe, “Literary Nomadics in Francophone Allegories of Postcolonialism”; and Pascale Perraudin, “Subversion de l’autorité dans *L’Enfant de sable* de Ben Jelloun.” Others have emphasized the theme of the body, especially in relation to doubling and hybridism, such as Jennifer Ballengee, “Ahmed-Zahra: Resisting the Split, Exploring the Wound”; Angela Bargenda, “Le Theme du double chez Tahar Ben Jelloun”; Jean Déjeux, “Les Romans de Tahar Ben Jelloun ou le Territoire de la blessure”; and Abbes Maazaoui, “*L’Enfant de sable* et *La Nuit sacrée* ou le corps tragique.” Still others have included more extended analyses of the narrative ambiguity and circularity of the text, often situating it within a literary tradition such as magical realism, the *Nouveau Roman*, or postmodernism. For example, Anne Chevalier, “Le voile des fables”; John Erickson, “Metoiki and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar Ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi”; Marie Fayad, “Borges in Tahar Ben Jelloun’s *L’Enfant de sable*: Beyond Intertextuality”; Robert Harvey, “Purloined Letters: Intertextuality and Intersexuality”; and Christiane Ndiaye, “De la pratique des detours chez Sembene, Chamoiseau et Ben Jelloun.” In my study of indeterminate gender and narrative indeterminacy, the essay by Odile Cazenave, “Gender, Age and Narrative Transformations” and the unpublished master’s thesis by Sarah Lynn Skrainka, “*L’Enfant de sable*: Roman de l’ambiguïté” have been especially helpful.
 4. In the *Roman de Silence*, Cador’s cousin, who recently lost her own infant child, raises Silence with the help of a loyal seneschal in an isolated house in the woods. These two are aware of the child’s identity. In *L’Enfant de sable* Ahmed’s parents also confide “his” biological sex to the trusted family nurse at Ahmed’s birth.
 - 5.

Ainc feme, voir, de mon parage
 Ne mena mais si fait usage,
 Ne jo plus longhes nel menrai:
 A us de feme me tenrai. (2555–9)

6.

Raisons ra od li tant esté,
 Se li a tant admonesté
 Que Silences a bien veü
 Que fol conseil avoit creü
 Quant onques pensa desuser
 Son bon viel us et refuser,
 Por us de feme maintenir. (2625–31)

7. Nature and Noureture are actual allegorical characters in the *Roman de Silence*; in *L'Enfant de sable*, the narrator(s), as well as Ahmed, make reference to the forces of nature and of culture, but they do not appear as allegorical characters.
8. See lines 3763, 3785, 3871, 3954, or the variant, “Comme vallés, bon puciele,” in line 4972.
9. Although cumbersome and inelegant, I have chosen to use parentheses (e.g., hero[ine]s) and slashes (hero/ine, he/she, his/her, etc.) throughout this study to underscore this hybridism. The texts themselves alternate between masculine and feminine gendered nouns and pronouns. Many scholars of the two works have adopted the strategy of referring to Silence and to Ahmed in the masculine while they perform as males, and in the feminine when they assume the female gender. I want to stress, however, that even though the texts may at times argue for a single gendered identity, the overwhelming force of both works demonstrates otherwise.
10. In her analysis of the film *Tootsie*, Marjorie Garber also emphasizes that the power of the cross-dressed hero/ine, Michael Dorsey/Dorothy Michaels (Dustin Hoffman) stems from her *double* status, rather than from either one of her genders: “To see *Tootsie* as a film about men’s views of women (and of feminism) is to erase or repress any awareness of that which the metadramatic nature of the film constantly stresses: the fact that ‘Dorothy’s’ power inheres in her blurred gender, in the fact of her cross-dressing, and not—despite the stereotypical romantic ending—in *either* of her gendered identities” (*Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* [New York: Routledge, 1992], 6, emphasis original). I will argue similarly against a reading of Silence’s ultimate marriage to King Ebains as an inevitable misogynistic ending to the romance. Rather, I believe that throughout the romance, we see Silence’s power as lying in her blurred gender. In *L'Enfant de sable*, the text never attempts to state otherwise.
11. Many scholars interested in cross gender behavior and queer theory have begun using phrases incorporating the term “third” as a means to dispute the standard binary division of sexes. For example, Gilbert Herdt, a social anthropologist, emphasizes in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (New York: Zone Books, 1994) that not all cultures share the contemporary Western belief in two genders, male and female, that correspond naturally to the two biological sexes. Herdt uses two terms, “third sex” and “third gender,” to describe people, such as castrati and hermaphrodites, who are neither “male” nor “female.” Garber, in *Vested Interests*, notes that the sexually ambivalent

- Theodore in Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* refers to him/herself as belonging to a third sex (*Vested Interests* 11), and stresses that in her (Garber's) analysis, the concept of the "third" is not a term or a sex, and "certainly not an instantiated 'blurred' sex as signified by a term like 'androgynous' or 'hermaphrodite'" (11). Instead, Garber uses the expression to represent a radical challenge to binary thinking: "The third deconstructs the binary or self and other that was itself a comfortable, because commutable and thus controllable, fiction of complementarity. But—or and—it is not itself a third one; it is rather something that challenges the possibility of harmonious and stable binary symmetry" (11–12). E.Jane Burns, in *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993), calls for a "third term" that could offer a new way to refigure female subjectivity, "a way to move from subjection to subjecthood," outside of the "inexorable" either/or, dyadic paradigms that "make the body second in importance to the mind" (245–47).
12. The essays by Labbie, McCracken and Waters and the book by Burns also examine Silence's cross-dressing in the *Roman de Silence* in terms of a possible subversion of the traditional gender binary. See Erin F.Labbie, "The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):63–77. Peggy McCracken, "The Boy Who Was a Girl': Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*," *Romanic Review* 85:4 (1995): 517–36. Elizabeth A.Waters, "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternative Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):35–46. E.Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993).
 13. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler expands on the subversive aspect of cross-dressing: "Drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (125).
 14. I consider this idea at length in chapter 4.
 15. See also James A.Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987), 108 on St. Cyprian; and Bullough, *Sexual Variance* 364–69 and 393–94 on cross dressing in the early and late Middle Ages in the West.
 16. For further information on the association of male transvestism, homosexuality, and witchcraft in the late Middle Ages, see Jeffrey Richards, *Sex, Dissidence, and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1972) and Bullough, *Sexual Variance* 393, and 411 n. 75 and n. 76.
 17. Garber's work comes immediately to mind as an attempt to re-claim the historical and literary cross-dresser in a new and positive light. See *Vested Interests* (1992).
 18. For a study that focuses more specifically on cross-dressing, see Vern L. Bullough and Bonnie Bullough, *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993). Bullough also re-edits much of the material on female transvestism in medieval Europe from *Sexual Variance* in his *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (1996).
 19. For additional information on medieval female-to-male transvestites, see Valerie Hotchkiss, *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in Medieval Europe* (New York: Garland, 1996); John Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," *Viator* 5 (1974), 1–37; Jo Ann McNamara, "Muffled Voices: The Lives of Consecrated Women in the Fourth Century," *Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1, *Distant Echoes*, eds. John A.Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Cistercian Studies Series, No. 71 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984); Vern L.Bullough, "Transvestites in the Middle Ages," *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974), 1381–94; and Vern L.Bullough, "Cross-Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages," Vern L.Bullough and James A.Brundage, eds., *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* (New York: Garland, 1996).

20. C.S.Ford and F.A.Beach discovered socially sanctioned cross-dressing in 49 of the 76 non-western societies that they studied in *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* (New York: Harper, 1951).
21. *Information for the Female-to-Male Crossdresser and Transsexual* (2nd edition, San Francisco: L.Sullivan, 1985).
22. A partial and unsystematic listing of such studies includes the following: J.R. B.Ball, "Transsexualism and Transvestism," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 1:4 (1967), 188–95; Harry Benjamin, "Transvestism and Transsexualism in the Male and Female," *Journal of Sex Research* 3:2 (1967), 107–27; I.K.Bond and D.R.Evans, "Avoidance Therapy: Its Use in Two Cases of Underwear Fetishism," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 96 (22 April 1967), 1160–62; H.Bierley, *Transvestism: A Handbook with Case Studies for Psychologists, Psychiatrists, and Counselors* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1979); H.Taylor Buckner, "The Transvestic Career Path," *Psychiatry* 33 (1970), 381–9; N.Burich, "A Heterosexual Transvestite Club: Psychiatric Aspects," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 10:4 (1976), 331–5; N. Burich, "A Case of Familial Heterosexual Transvestism," *Acta Psychiatrica et Neurologica Scandinavica* 53:3 (1977), 199–201; M.Norman Fisk, "Gender Dysphoria Syndrome: The Conception that Liberalizes Indications for Total Gender Reorientation and Implies a Broadly Based Multi-Dimensional Rehabilitative Regimen," *Western Journal of Medicine* 120 (May 1974), 386–91; Christian Hamburger, Georg K.Sturup and E.Dahl-Iversen, "Transvestism: Hormonal, Psychiatric, and Surgical Treatment," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 152:5 (1953), 391–6; Dave King, "Gender Confusions: Psychological and Psychiatric Conceptions of Transvestism and Transsexualism," *The Making of the Modern Homosexual*, ed. Kenneth Plummer (London: Hutchinson, 1981); Donald R.Laub and Patrick Gandy, eds., *Proceedings of the Second Interdisciplinary Symposium on Gender Dysphoria Syndrome* (Stanford: Stanford University Medical Center, 1973); Virginia Prince and P.M.Bentler, "Survey of 504 Cases of Transvestism," *Psychological Reports* 31 (1972), 903–17; Morley M.Segal, "Transvestism as an Impulse and as a Defence," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 46 (1965), 209–17; Robert J.Stoller, "Transvestism in Women," *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 11:2 (1982), 99–115; A.J.W.Taylor and D.G.McLachlan, "Clinical and Psychological Observations on Transvestism," *New Zealand Medical Journal* 61 (1962), 496–502; Thomas N.Wise, "Psychotherapy of an Aging Transvestite," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 5:4 (1979), 368–73; Thomas N.Wise, Carol Dupkin and Jon K.Meyer, "Partners of Distressed Transvestites," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 138:9 (1981), 1221–4; Thomas N.Wise and Jon K. Meyer, "The Border Area between Transvestism and Gender Dysphoria: Transvestite Applicants for Sex Reassignment," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 9:4 (1980), 327–42.
23. See, for example, Robert Bogdan, *Being Different: The Autobiography of Jane Fry* (New York: John Wiley, 1974); Monica Jay, *Geraldine: For the Love of a Transvestite* (London: Caliban, 1985); and John Pepper, *A Man's Tale* (London: Quartet, 1982).
24. In addition to *Vested Interests* (1992), Garber has published a second book analyzing the cultural aspects of sexual identity or orientation: *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
25. Cited on the cover of *Vested Interests*: "'erudite and exhilaratingly well argued.' *New York Times Book Review*."
26. Joshua Gamson notes in his article on television talk shows in the United States, "Do Ask, Do Tell" (*Utne Reader* 73 [Jan–Feb 1996], 78–83), that these shows commonly feature "sex and gender outsiders" (80). In their highly competitive search for the ever more exotic and sensational guest, these shows have come to consider cross-dressers one of their favorite "freaks" (Gamson 82). Gamson likens the titles of recent *Geraldo* programs to the calls of sideshow barkers: "Star-Crossed Cross-Dressers: Bizarre Stories of Transvestites and Their Lovers," "Outrageous Impersonators and Flamboyant Drag Queens," and "When Your Husband Wears the Dress in the Family" (82). According to Gamson, an episode by talk

show host Sally Jessy Raphael featured “our most outrageous former guests,” all of whom were gender crossers (83).

27. See Magnus Hirschfeld, *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleideuntrieb* (Berlin: Alfred Pulvermacher, 1910). There is also an English translation: *The Transvestites: An Investigation of the Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress with Comprehensive Questions of Right and Wrong in Conduct and Historical Material*, Trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1991). Another early sexologist, Havelock Ellis, took issue with Hirschfeld’s use of the term “transvestism” on the grounds that it was too narrow, put too much emphasis on the use of clothing, and neglected to stress the resistance to traditional sex/gender roles. Ellis preferred the term “Eonism,” based on the life of the French Chevalier d’Eon Beaumont (1728–1810), who lived most of his/her adult life as a woman and was only pronounced to be biologically male after his/her death. See Havelock Ellis, *Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies*, vol. 6, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A.Davis, 1926).
28. Woodhouse borrows this term from Robert Bodgan, *Being Different* (Woodhouse 60).
29. Herdt’s *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (1994) is an outstanding collection of historical and anthropological essays on ambiguously gendered persons that includes nuanced considerations of the essentialism/constructionism debate in gender identity formation. These intriguing essays also feature several non-western societies: “Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space,” “How to Become a Berdache: Toward a Unified Analysis of Gender Diversity,” “Hijras: An Alternative Sex and Gender Role in India,” and “Mistaken Sex: Culture, Biology and the Third Sex in New Guinea.”
30. See also the chapter “Women of the Landholding Classes,” especially p. 122–23.
31. See also lines 1865–8, 1882–87, and 1900–1901 for Nature’s creation of Silence.
32. See H. Gelzer, *Nature: Zum Einfluss der Scholastik auf den altfranzösischen Roman* (1917) for an early study of the influence of the figure of Nature in Alain de Lille’s *Anticlaudianus* on Old French poetry. See also E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (1953) on the Latin poets’ use of the Nature topos.
33. The legal status of girls in medieval Islamic inheritance law is the same as that of a hermaphrodite. In her study of hermaphrodites in medieval Islamic law, “Gendering the Ungendered Body,” Paula Sanders notes that the hermaphrodite (*khuntha*) inherits the same percentage as would a daughter: “If a father died leaving a son and also a hermaphrodite, the wealth was divided among them in three shares: two for the son and one for the *khuntha*, for the *khuntha* was treated as a female” (81–2).
34. During Muhammad’s lifetime, when the early Quranic verses were written, the Arabic writing system was not yet complete. For example, the dots that are necessary to distinguish between consonants were lacking, so that a group of consonants could produce several different readings (Leila Ahmed, “Early Islam and the Position of Women” 64).
35. The term “progress narrative” is Garber’s from *Vested Interests*. Garber explains her use of the term by describing the story of the life of jazz musician Billy Tipton as a classic “progress narrative.” Only after Tipton’s death did medical examiners reveal his “real,” female sex. The news astonished his wife and three adopted sons, who said that they would still always think of him as “Dad.” Garber says that analysts of this case consistently rationalized Tipton’s lifelong transvestism in terms of the advantages, or progress, that such a lifestyle provided: “S/he did this in order to a) get a job, b) find a place in a man’s world, and c) realize or fulfill some deep but acceptable need in terms of personal destiny, in this case, by becoming a jazz musician.” Garber stresses that the progress narrative avoids mention of sexuality (*Vested Interests* 69).
36. Bullough attributes the far greater hostility and aggressive punishment meted out to historical male-to-female cross-dressers in the Middle Ages in part to the suspicion that a

cross-dressed man must have dubious motives for desiring closer access to women ("Cross Dressing" 225).

37. Garber makes a remarkable, but puzzling, reference to sexual transvestism among women in the Middle Ages, noting a "wealth of historical research from the medieval and early modern periods...[that has]...turned up innumerable cases of women who were...fetishizing cross-dressers" (*Vested Interests* 121). Regrettably, in her generally well-documented book, Garber does not supply a reference for this comment.
38. Perret amplifies this statement, outlining the relationship between the daughter's transvestism and the father's attitude in the four romances that she studies:

On sait que dans *Silence*, le travestissement, qui a lieu dès la naissance, est imposé par le père, pour pouvoir transmettre ses terres à son enfant. Les autres textes mettent aussi en rapport ce changement apparent de sexe et la figure paternelle: il peut s'agir d'une simple disparition du père, comme pour Grisandole, ou d'un violent désir incestueux prêt à se réaliser, comme pour Yde. Entre ces deux extremes se situent les étranges relations de Blanchandine avec un père autoritaire et jaloux, qui utilise sa fille comme monnaie d'échange, en tentant sans cesse de la marier à quelque allié. (331)

39. The masculine and feminine suffixes *-us/-a* are common among early medieval transvestite monks, such as Pelagius/Pelagia, Marinus/Marina, and others (Bullough, *Sexual Variance* 366–67).
40. Khémaïs is a traditional Arabic male name.
41. In the Arabic alphabet, the equivalent letters to A and Z do not occur at opposing ends of the alphabet (the Z occurs mid-way through the alphabet), but Ben Jelloun wrote *L'Enfant de sable* in French, not in Arabic. In her discussion of the significance of the names of the principal characters in the novel, Sarah Skrainka also mentions that Ahmed-Zahra's hybrid name encompasses "everything," "from A to Z":

Pour garder le sens hybride du personnage, baptisons-le Ahmed-Zahra. Cette appellation évoque d'une part sa pluralité car Ahmed-Zahra contient tout, de A à Z, et d'autre part son androgynie. Le père de Ahmed-Zahra s'appelle Ahmed, et il sera distingué de son fils par le titre honorifique de 'Hadj' suivi de son prénom. La mère du protagoniste, comme ses soeurs à lui, ne sont jamais nommées dans le roman. (2)

42. Butler sketches an outline of the development of this thinking in her introductory chapter:

In the philosophical tradition that begins with Plato and continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body invariably supports relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether. The cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism. (*Gender Trouble* 12)

43. Kate Mason Cooper notes that "nus" can mean both "no one" and "nude." The latter meaning would, of course, offer an ironic meaning since if *Silence* were nude, her (false) identity as a male would be revealed. Losing this identity, *Silence* would become, in a sense, *someone else* or *no one* (Cooper 341). Peggy McCracken, after Cooper and Burns, stresses that the wordplay on *nus* (no one) / *nus* (nude) asserts the relative importance of name and clothing over anatomy in the establishment of *Silence*'s identity: "*Silence* proclaims that without 'cover' she is without identity" (527).

44. I have used Roche-Mahdi's edition here for line 2664, rather than Thorpe's because her version ("Com enfant de tel natiön,") makes more sense to me than Thorpe's "C'on en fait de tel natiön." Roche-Mahdi italicizes "Com," noting that the manuscript reads "con" (320).
45. See Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *La Jeune née* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975). The English translation (by Betsy Wing) of Cixous's chapter "Sorties," entitled "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays" has been reprinted in a number of works.
46. In the following line, Ebain adds "Mellor n'engendra roi ne cuens" (6581). Stock points out that Ebain thereby inversely acknowledges his own masculine shortcoming—his failure to sire an heir (Stock 16).
47. Gallagher remarks on the similarities between Silence's use of the "guise of jongleur" and Nicolette's in the chantefable *Aucassin et Nicolette* (Gallagher 32).
48. Italics from Thorpe's edition of line 2872. Thorpe notes: "*el en*, copied *en el*" (237).
49. For Labbie, Silence's performance as a jongleur has a decidedly therapeutic effect, "mitigating the trauma associated with Silence's constant awareness of the performance of gendered identity. If she is always performing as a jongleur, then the feeling of loss and lack imposed by the difference between her sex and her gender might be lessened by calling attention to the process of constant performance in daily life" (70). Whereas I agree with Labbie's analysis that the parallels between Silence's roles as a young knight and as a jongleur highlight the performative aspect of the gendered role and bring the thematics of performance to an even more central and explicit position in the romance, I do not find evidence for a significant emotional component to the role of jongleur.
50. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick make brief reference to this history in the introduction to their book, *Performativity and Performance*: "When is saying something doing something? And how is saying something doing something? If they aren't coeval with language itself, these questions certainly go as far back, even in European thought, as—take your pick—Genesis, Plato, Aristotle" (1).
51. To complicate matters further, these thinkers often use the term "performativity" to mean different things, as Sedgwick notes:

For while philosophy and theater now share 'performative' as a common lexical item, the term has hardly come to mean 'the same thing' for each. Indeed, the stretch between theatrical and deconstructive meanings of 'performative' seems to span the polarities of, at either extreme, the *extroversion* of the actor, the *introversion* of the signifier. Michael Fried's opposition [in *Absorption and Theatricality*] between theatricality and absorption seems custom-made for this paradox about 'performativity': in its deconstructive sense, performativity signals absorption; in the vicinity of the stage, however, the performative is theatrical. But in another range of usages, a text like Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* uses 'performativity' to mean an extreme of something like *efficiency*—postmodern representation as a form of capitalist efficiency—while, again, the deconstructive 'performativity' of Paul de Man [in *Allegories of Reading*] or J.Hillis Miller [in *Tropes, Parables, Performatives*] seems to be characterized by the dislinkage precisely of cause and effect between the signifier and the world ("Queer Performativity" 2).

52. See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context," *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1982).

CHAPTER 3. PARALLEL AMBIGUITIES

1. Both Thorpe and Roche-Mahdi write a slash at the end of line 2518 without further explanation.
2. In the passage that Cooper translates, Silence reflects on his/her own name and identity, saying: "Silencius! qui sui jo donques?/Silencius ai non, jo cui,/U jo sui altres que ne fui" (2533–2535). Cooper notes that "Silencius ai non" could be translated in two ways, either as "I have the name Silencius [*Silence*]" or as "I do not have Silencius [*Silence*]" (Cooper 341, brackets original). Silence concludes this passage with another open-ended statement: "Donc sui jo Scilentius,/Cho m'est avis, u jo sui nus" (2537–2538). As I noted in Chapter 2, Cooper points out two possible translations of these lines, underscoring the ambiguity in the statement "u jo sui nus": "Therefore I am Scilentius [*Silence*], /It seems to me, or I am nothing" or ".../It seems to me, or I am nude" (Cooper 341).
3. As I noted previously, however, whereas Cador establishes the distinction between the masculine and feminine suffixes *-us* and *-a* when choosing Silence's Latinate name, in practice the text obviates the necessity of such a distinction through the use of an Old French proper name, Silence, which can stand without a pronoun.
4. Psaki makes a similar point in "The Modern Editor and Medieval 'Misogyny.'"
5. See Krueger, Jewers and Waters, for example.
6. Cooper, Bloch, Allen, Gaunt, and Labbie have focused especially on Cador's naming of Silence (2074–82) and the relationship of this passage to the rest of the text.
7. Jewers points out that if Silence's identity is revealed, Silence's name may also offer important legal protection to Cador, based on a legal principle from the *Digest* of Justinian:

Qui tacet, non utique fatetur: sed tamen verum est eum non negare.

[He who is silent does not always confess; still, it is true he does not deny.]

Thus, in addition to temporarily suspending the bearer's gender, the name Silence implies legal neutrality in the event of a dispute, and might indeed technically absolve Cador, since where there is silence there is no guilt, even if the truth is suppressed. Because silence carries its full weight as a grammatical and legal substantive, more than the ending of the word is at stake. (94–95; See also notes 6 and 7 for legal sources)

8. Stock, too, makes use of this wordplay to note that Silence and her mother, Eufemie, share an ability to self-educate, which she posits as vital to Silence's successful passing:

Silence's name, spelled 'Scilense,' resonates with the Latin and Old French root for 'knowledge,' 'scientia'. Precociously early, Silence matches, even surpasses her mother's potential for not only education, but self-education (2367–68, 2385–95). This inherited educability allows her to learn the unnatural male-gendered activities necessary to her pose as a boy and to imitate her father's valor. (23)

9. Psaki poses a similar question in "The Modern Editor and Medieval 'Misogyny.'"
10. Cooper translates this passage as follows:

She comes into her friend's room.

She says to him: '*Amis*, speak, *haymmi*!'
 She was supposed to say: '*Speak a moi*,'
 But Love had so disturbed her
 That she had to say: '*Speak a mi*,'
 If she said to him, '*Speak, haymmi*'
 '*Speak a mi*' she was supposed to say,
 But '*haymmi*' was lying on her heart.
 As soon as she had said '*amis*,'
 At the end of the line '*haymmi*' she put.
 '*Ami*' she was supposed to say and '*haymmi*' she said,
 Because of the pain which resided within her. (Cooper 351)

11. Bloch translates the passage in which Eufemie goes to Cadore's room as follows:

She came to her beloved's room and said to him: 'Friend, speak, hate me.' She meant to say, 'Speak to me,' but Love pulled such a trick as to make her say 'Speak, hate me' instead of 'Speak to me.' But 'hate me' remained on her heart. As soon as she said '*amis*' she said 'hate me!' She should have said '*Ami*,' and she said 'hate me!' because of the pain that is in her. (Bloch 94)

12. Cooper's translation of this passage again underscores the polysemy:

If you have nothing against it,
 upside down
 I must lead my life
 in verse
 Cry in your adversity,
 Laugh in your prosperity. (Cooper 351)

13. Cooper notes that these two designations of the term *conte* are often orthographically assimilated. See, for example, the explanation of why Ebain has cancelled female inheritance, v. 305 (Cooper 344 n. 4).
14. At a later point, Cooper does expand on her understanding of this poetic perfection as referring to an unlimited openness, rather than the restricted search for some elusive Truth that seems to be implied in the previous citation: "If the production of poetry is the linguistic expression of the desire to approach that pure, perfect hollow of meaning, that absence or gap which admits all possibility, then it must be remembered that the poet's own medium has gaps of its own" (353).
15. Loren Ringer mentions other examples of wordplay in her essay, "Exchange, Identity, and Transvestism in *Le Roman de Silence*": *ennemi/ami* and *desire/dire* (Ringer 5). She also lists *silence/science*, the pairing the Cooper analyzes at length; *desvaleter/despuceler*, which Perret examines; and she makes note of the linguistic games that Bloch discusses. Ringer sees in the linguistic malleability of these examples echos of the thematics of transvestism: "All of these linguistic elements bring language into question, pointing to its disfiguring and mutable qualities" (6).

16. Regina Psaki's essay, "The Modern Editor and Medieval 'Misogyny': Text Editing and *Le Roman de Silence*," addresses this issue further. Distinguishing between the "deft and subtle" author of this "rich tale" and the "earnest, leaden narrator" ("Text Editing" 84), Psaki refers to the romance's "double perspective—a sophisticated tale told by a simple teller" ("Introduction" to *Silence* xxxii). As she notes, however, modern text editing tends to conceal this distinction between the author and narrator, giving the narrator too much importance and obscuring the "fundamental ambiguity of the author's position" ("Text" 84). In the medieval manuscript, Psaki explains, the speeches of neither the narrator nor any of the characters would be identified by quotation marks so that each would be of equal import. In modern editions, quotation marks are added to the speeches of the other characters, which sets apart the narrator's comments, endowing his speeches "with an authoritative weight by default" ("Text" 84). Psaki argues that if modern text editors would not add quotation marks, then the narrator of the *Roman de Silence* would be "more visibly idiosyncratic" ("Text" 84).
17. Lecoy refutes Thorpe's identification of the *Estoire de Merlin* as the source of the Merlin episode in the *Roman de Silence*. Lecoy turns to the work of L.A. Patton who discusses a group of tales which more closely resemble the situation of Silence. See Felix Lecoy, "'Le Roman de Silence' d'Heldris de Cornualle," 109–110; L.A. Patton, *PMLA* 22 (1907):234–276.
18. Krueger also identifies Heldris as siding distinctly with Nature throughout the romance: "The narrator has been a proponent of the 'natural' order throughout the Nature/Noretur debate. With Eufeme's appearance, his interventions become increasingly misogynistic condemnations of woman's 'nature'" (121). Whereas I would agree that the narrator of the *Roman de Silence* stresses woman's unfortunate nature, I do not see this as equivalent to his advocating or being "a proponent of the 'natural' order."
19. For further discussion of these and other examples of the inconsistent narrative voice, see Psaki, "Text Editing" 84.
20. Krueger also highlights the narrator's repetition of "blasme Eufeme" and "Eufeme moult blasme" as underscoring his own "anxiety about what he rightly understands to be the source of the problem: his harsh treatment of the wicked Queen Eufeme" (125). Krueger, however, does not find this conclusion illogical or contradictory, but rather sees it as further evidence of Heldris's anxious misogyny: "Heldris's defense that his lavish praise of Silence compensates for his destruction of the queen accentuates the misogyny of the romance's purported 'moral'" (125).
21. Psaki describes the "canonical romance" as "part *Bildungsroman* and part *miroir des chevaliers*" (xiv–xvi).
22. For a more detailed analysis of the evolution of male and female markers in Ahmed's diaries, see Cazenave (page 444 and following).
23. Whereas many scholars of *L'Enfant de sable* have seen in the Blind Troubadour an homage to Jorge-Luis Borges, Marie Fayad has written a detailed comparison of the two. Fayad states that the physical description of the troubadour matches that of Borges, that the biographical and personal details of the two are consistent, and that the troubadour's words duplicate, many times exactly, passages of Borges's short stories and autobiographical essays. Fayad mentions additionally several themes in *L'Enfant de sable* that figure prominently in the work of Borges, such as labyrinths, mirrors, tigers, and the confusion of dreams and reality. Fayad also notes that Borges was himself a master of enigmatic, nonlinear writing, and of intertextuality. See Marie Fayad, "Borges in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*: Beyond Intertextuality," *The French Review* 67:2 (1993):291–99. In a brief earlier publication, Jean-Noël Pancrazi also considers the similarities between the two: Jean-Noël Pancrazi, "Les portes qui mènent aux lointaines régions du corps," *Quinzaine Littéraire* 449 (1985): 33–34.

24. Although Simpson identifies *l'homme au turban bleu* specifically as Ben Jelloun himself, her insistence on the collapse of distinct subject identities would hold, whether or not the author has inserted a personal portrait:

After the second storyteller dies of a broken heart, at least five other voices emerge to continue the story in five different ways. All versions are different.... The distinction between author and character breaks down further when Ben Jelloun himself appears as the man in the blue turban, the last storyteller. As he speaks, we realize that he was also the first.... Like Pirandello, the first and the last storyteller has lost control over the story he began. (328–9)

25. Erickson finds in the character of Fatouma, one of the original audience members who becomes a narrator, the articulation of the desire of the Arabic woman to speak in her own voice—a desire which Erickson sees as parallel to that of the postcolonial writer: “Fatouma a envie de s’engager dans le présent, dans le récit (vocalisé) de son propre état de femme. L’écrivain postcolonial fait face au même dilemme—de faire parler le récit d’un autre ou de se taire. La question se pose encore une fois: une alternative peut-elle exister?” (294). For Erickson, the alternative lies in Ben Jelloun’s rejection of narrative linearity and closure:

La femme arabe qui cherche un tel discours existe...dans un ‘double bind’ (double dilemme)—son discours est menacé de répression comme discours postcolonial par le discours de pouvoir occidental et comme discours hérétique par le mâle arabe traditionnel aussi bien que par l’Islam. Ben Jelloun suggère une stratégie pour la femme arabe, stratégie qui joue un rôle important dans son récit: le repli du récit sur lui-même, de manière que l’externe devienne interne, le dehors le dedans. Dans l’intertexte des *Mille et une nuits* le récit, qui passe à travers plusieurs degrés d’enchâssement, finit quand l’histoire enchâssée de Schéhérazade s’enchâsse en elle-même. (294)

26. Chevalier sees in this openendedness evidence of religious transgression and eternal damnation, rather than the freedom from restrictions and narrow definitions that I find:

On entrevoit ici comment *L’Enfant de sable* joue sur une double malédiction, qui est au fond la même, une transgression de l’interdit religieux, celle de Babel, celle de l’enfant androgyne. A la fixité intouchable du livre sacré, le Koran, s’oppose les jeux verbaux de l’enfant maudit et des conteurs qui, porteurs de son histoire, deviennent à leur tour maudits. Tous, héros et conteurs, sont voués à l’errance infinie du manque d’être dont le sable est le symbole. (65)

27. Erickson states: “Il y a confrontation entre le choix d’une part de vivre dans le monde et de se servir du discours/récit d’un autre, et d’autre part d’exister hors du monde dans un lieu sans lieu où on se tue, où on vit sans voix” (294).
28. For Gontard the lack of narrative closure recalls Eastern mysticism: “La mise en oeuvre, dans *L’Enfant de sable*, d’un récit méta-narratif qui développe la théorie du récit comme énigme nous renvoie à une vision du monde dominée par le *Secret* (comme dans la mystique soufie) où l’Être ici-bas, dont Ahmed-Zahra est la figure ambivalente, ne peut connaître que sa propre étrangeté” (66).

CHAPTER 4. THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE TO THE PRIMACY OF THE SEXED BODY

1. Psaki identifies this “enigmatic figure” as perhaps Merlin himself (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxxv). Roche-Mahdi equates the two more emphatically, and identifies Merlin as a narrative link, connecting the old man who appears to Silence earlier in the romance, shortly after he/she arrives back home as a *menestrel*, with the white-haired man who appears to him/her now in the woods: “This old man [the old man in the minstrel episode] is certainly Merlin in disguise, penetrating Silence’s disguise and unmasking her, just as he appears later as [a] white-haired old man (i.e., in human form, not stag, as in ‘Grisandole’) to help her with his own capture. Thus, Heldris forges a link between the two parts of the narrative” (325). Stock, referring to Roche-Mahdi’s association of the two old men notes: “If the other mysterious old man who helps Silence in the minstrel subplot (3559) is also Merlin in disguise, his appearance has been prepared for textually” (33 n. 48). Stock also points out that in numerous Arthurian romances Merlin participates actively and voluntarily in his own downfall:

In all versions, whether through ‘dotage,’ sexual ‘assotment’ (Malory 76), fatal attraction to Nineve/Vivian, or succumbing to a trick, Merlin voluntarily relinquishes his power and collaborates in his own undoing (Macdonald *passim*). Here too Merlin, disguised as an old man, literally gives Silence the edible props which will allow her to capture him” (*Silence* 5944–86) (Stock 25).

2. Peggy McCracken, invoking *Gender Trouble* (78), arrives at a very similar reading:

When Silence succeeds in capturing Merlin and bringing him to court, a task that according to Merlin’s own prophecy only a woman could accomplish, she/he becomes a visible disjunction: Silence’s ability to capture Merlin is a feminine performance that contradicts his/her masculine clothes. The successful quest marks Silence as a culturally unintelligible being who must be reincorporated into a system in which male and female correspond to clearly defined social and sexual roles. (531)

3. Maazaoui, through a study of the portraits and descriptions of female bodies in *L’Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, concludes that Ben Jelloun repeatedly makes use of two descriptive techniques: “le portrait parcellaire et le portrait du corps en crise” (73). Maazaoui notes that these techniques create a narrative parallel to an ideological devaluation of women: “On relève ainsi une correspondance profonde entre les techniques descriptives mises en oeuvre et l’‘infirmité’ à laquelle se réduit le corps féminin” (75). This female infirmity in turn reflects the misogyny of the culture at large: “Les deux romans de Ben Jelloun sont ainsi l’expression, à tous les niveaux, des méfaits de la misogynie et de la violence dans la société marocaine de culture arabo-musulmane” (75).
4. Bargenda emphasizes the central role of the mirror in *L’Enfant de sable* and in other works by Ben Jelloun: “Le miroir demeure le symbole-clé qui sert à matérialiser le dédoublement des protagonistes” (22). In *L’Enfant de sable* she notes that this doubling has a tragic quality: “Le narrateur ampute l’image du miroir de toute signification salutaire et révélatrice pour faire véhiculer une connotation entièrement négative car il ne symbolise plus la composition du Moi à partir de l’Autre, mais s’impose comme témoin tragique de la déchirure” (22).

Thus, from adolescence through young adulthood, Ahmed makes a point of avoiding mirrors, but when he/she embarks on a new existence and gender identity, the confrontation of his/her image in mirrors plays a central role.

5.

Silence respont come sage:
 ‘Chi a gent don, Dex le vos mire,
 Et al fait pert quels est li sire.’ (6644–46)

6. Psaki notes more generally that the ending of the *Roman de Silence* does not negate Silence’s challenge to biological determinism: “But the fact of the ending does not negate or neutralize the radical events that preceded it. The universe remains disturbed: commonplaces about biological and social gender have still been shaken, and the pat ending with its pat commentary do not successfully repair the rift in the conceptual fabric” (“Introduction” to *Silence* xxxii).

7. McCracken states generally of medieval transvestite romances:

The initial discrepancy set forth between anatomy and disguise displaces the body as the location of gender, and the fiction of the regendered body undermines the notion of a stable, unchanging anatomy that defines permanent, verifiable identity.... Yet even the mutable body retains the authority to determine gender. Whether the body is changed to conform to the clothes or the clothes to conform to the body, gender ambiguity is always eliminated. (521)

8. Roche-Mahdi comments on the “not-so-subliminal message” of their names themselves: Eufemie, which means “use of good speech” and Eufeme, which Roche-Mahdi translates as, “Alas! Woman!” (xx).
9. Stock points out that Eufemie’s education connects her to the more powerful male world of the intellect as it prefigures Silence’s “similar intellectual achievement” (22). Furthermore, Eufemie’s and Silence’s education associates them with Merlin, Stock states, “who embodies knowledge and power in the Arthurian corpus” (22).
10. Brahney 55.
11. McCracken poses the same question: “First, it is pertinent to interrogate exactly what the king saw inscribed on Silence’s body, since the ‘truth’ of Silence’s anatomy does not appear to be self-evident at all” (532).
12. McCracken also underscores the “fantastic” quality of the miraculous regenderings in medieval romances that feature transvestite heroines, such as *Yde et Olive* and *Tristan de Nanteuil*: “What these romances imagine, however fantastically, is a body whose sexual features conform to a gender performance” (521). In *L’Enfant de sable* and *La Nuit sacrée*, Marc Gontard stresses the enigmatic, marvelous and fantastic aspects of the two narratives (66–67). John Erickson also likens *L’Enfant de sable* to the stylistics typical of Magical Realism: John Erickson, “*Metoikoi* and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi,” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke UP, 1995), 427–450.
13. See Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).
14. See Aristotle, *History of Animals* V, 6, trans. D’Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *The Works of Aristotle* Vol. 4, eds. J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1910). Among those animals that Aristotle believed to reproduce spontaneously were fleas, mosquitoes and

flies, all of which he thought were produced out of putrefying substances. Bullough notes that Aristotle's "favorite example" of spontaneous self-generation was the eel:

As proof he pointed out that no eel had ever been found supplied with either milt or spawn, nor when it was cut open, was it possible to see any passages for spawn or eggs. As further evidence, he reported that eels appeared after a fall of rain, even where the standing pools had been drained and the mud dredged. On the other hand, they never appeared in stagnant pools, even in times of drought. This led him to conclude that eels were derived from the 'earth's guts' and grew spontaneously in mud on sustenance from rainwater. (Bullough 5)

15. Redi conducted an experiment involving covered and uncovered containers in order to arrive at the conclusion that flies did not generate spontaneously:

Redi filled a number of vessels with fresh meat, cheese, and other substances subject to decay. He wrapped some of these containers tightly with gauze and left others uncovered. All were placed where they would receive the hot sun and become putrescent. Later, when Redi examined them, he found the unsealed vessels swarming with maggots but the closed ones not. On closer examination he found tiny eggs clinging to the gauze of the covered vessels and concluded these eggs had been deposited by blowflies attracted by the odor of decay. (Bullough 6)

16. For further information on the central role of Arabic scientists and writers in the transmission of Aristotelian ideas to medieval Europe and the development of scientific thought from the eighth century, see Said al-Andalusi, *Science in the Medieval World: Book of the Categories of Nations*, trans. and eds. Semaan I. Salem and Alok Kumar (Austin: U of Texas P, 1991), a translation of the work by the eleventh-century Arabic philologist, natural philosopher, historian and judge. See also Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) for additional discussion of the Greco-Roman roots of medieval science, the importance of the Arabic scientists and translators, and the crucial position of medieval theologians in the interpretation of scientific findings. Pearl Kibre, *Studies in Medieval Science: Alchemy, Astrology, Mathematics and Medicine* (London: The Hambleton Press, 1984) presents essays, articles and translations of excerpts of key scientific texts from the period.
17. Avicenna described the cheese-like process of human reproduction as revolving around successful clotting: "The male agent was equivalent to the clotting agent of milk and the female 'sperm' to the coagulum. Just as the starting point of the clotting was in the rennet, so the starting point of the clot that was to become 'man' was in the male semen" (Bullough 9; See Avicenna, *Canon of Medicine*, trans. O.Cameron Gruner, [London: Luzak and Co., 1930], I, 196, 23).
18. See Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology* (New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1959); Clifford Dobell, *Antony van Leeuwenhoek and His 'Little Animals'* (Reprinted, New York: Russell & Russell, 1958); and F.J.Cole, *Early Theories of Sexual Generation* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1930). For an account written in the eighteenth century, see Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertius, *The Earthly Venus*, translated from the *Venus Physique* by Simone Brangier Boas with notes and introduction by George Boas (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1966). All of these works are cited by Bullough, *Sexual Variance* 20 n. 18.

19. See J.H.Tijio and A.Levan, "The Chromosome Number of Man," *Hereditas* XLII (1956):1–6. For background to this discovery, see Malcolm Jay Kottler, "From 48 to 46: Cytological Technique, Preconception and the Counting of Human Chromosomes," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* XLVIII (1974): 465–502. Both cited in Bullough, *Sexual Variance* 20 n. 19.
20. Bullough states that this may also occur if the pregnant woman has a tumor or other condition that causes her to produce a large number of male hormones. Furthermore, the use in the past of the synthetic hormone progesterin to save pregnancies threatened by miscarriage resulted in a statistically abnormally high number of cases of this condition due to progesterin's "masculinization of the fetus" (Bullough 15).
21. See John Money, J.G.Hampson, and J.L.Hampson, "An Examination of Some Basic Sexual Concepts: The Evidence of Human Hermaphroditism," *Bulletin Johns Hopkins Hospital* XCVII (1955): 301–319; J.L.Hampson and J.G.Hampson, "The Ontogenesis of Sexual Behavior in Man," *Sex and Internal Secretions*, 3rd edition, ed. W.C.Young (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins, 1961), 1401–1432. See also John Money and Anke A.Ehrhardt, *Man & Woman, Boy & Girl* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1972), in which Money and Ehrhardt undertake research on individuals who are not classified as pseudohermaphrodites but who, like Silence and Ahmed, have been deliberately raised in a sex role that contradicts their anatomy.
22. Of course, we must also interpret Bullough's terminology of "a gender role consistent with their assigned sex and rearing" as implying consistent within the heterosexual norms of dominant society.
23. In 1993, the geneticist Anne Fausto-Sterling published an article in the journal *The Sciences*, entitled "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough," in which she describes the "legal erasure and medical reassignment of intersexed persons, those whose bodies are, biologically, anatomically, or chemically, a mixture of male and female" (*Vice Versa* 269; Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes," *The Sciences*, March/April 1993, 20–24.). Garber also comments on the insistence within Western culture that there are only two sexes:

The deep commitment of Western culture to the idea that there are only two sexes, exemplified in the limitations of language...and law (over the past century rights and obligations like the vote, the military draft, marriage, and private, consensual sex have all been governed by state or national laws about males and females), has led to a cultural resistance to openly intersexed individuals. (*Vice Versa* 269)

Fausto-Sterling refers to intersexed individuals by the following terminology: "'herms' (true hermaphrodites, with one testis and one ovary), 'merms' (male pseudohermaphrodites, with testes, some aspects of female genitalia, but no ovaries), and 'ferms' (female pseudohermaphrodites, with ovaries and some aspects of male genitalia but no testes)" (*Vice Versa* 269).

24. For a sampling of recent feminist research of political biases in biology and the history of science, Butler recommends the following works: Ruth Hubbard and Marian Lowe, eds., *Genes and Gender*, vols 1 and 2 (New York: Gordian Press, 1978, 1979); *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 2:3 (Fall 1987) and 3:1 (Spring 1988), especially "The Importance of Feminist Critique for Contemporary Cell Biology" in the Spring 1988 issue; Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986); Evelyn Fox-Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1984); Donna Haraway, "In the Beginning was the Word: The Genesis of Biological Theory," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6:3 (1981); Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions* (New York:

- Routledge, 1989); Sandra Harding and Jean F.O'Barr, *Sex and Scientific Inquiry* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987); Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories About Women and Men* (New York: Norton, 1979). See *Gender Trouble* 151–52, n. 9.
25. Butler cites Fausto-Sterling, "Life in the XY Corral," 328 (*Gender Trouble* 106). See David C. Page, et al., "The sex-determining region of the human Y chromosome encodes a finger protein," *Cell* 51, 1091–1104 (*Gender Trouble* 166 n. 24).
 26. As concerns these medical designations, Butler comments: "He [Page] does not tell us exactly on what basis they had been designated contrary to the chromosomal findings, but we are left to presume that obvious primary and secondary characteristics suggested that those were, indeed, the appropriate designations" (*Gender Trouble* 107).
 27. See Eva Eicher and Linda Washburn, "Genetic control of primary sex determination in mice," *Annual Review of Genetics* 20 (1986):327–360. Cited in Fausto-Sterling's "Life in the XY Corral."
 28. Butler's terminology, *Gender Trouble* 109.
 29. Wittig's goal is a radical overthrow of the discourse on sex: "to overthrow the very grammar that institutes 'gender'—or 'fictive sex'—as an essential attribute of humans and objects alike" (*Gender Trouble* 113). In a similar vein, Leslie Feinberg, in *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) laments the limitations of the available English pronouns: "There are no pronouns in the English language as complex as I am," Feinberg states. In contrast, Feinberg mentions the "Two-Spirit tradition" of some native American societies, citing Wesley Thomas of the Navajo Nation, who told Feinberg that "when he placed gender on a continuum—with female at one end and male at the other—he could identify 49 different genders in between" (cited by Sally Owen, "Transforming History," *On the Issues* [Fall 1996], 48).
 30. Butler's terminology. See, for example, *Gender Trouble* 16–17.
 31. Schor also points out that in contemporary politics, essentialism has been demonized because of the association of essentialism and lesbianism, especially separatist lesbianism, as separatist lesbians are seen as "challenging directly the social-symbolic institution of heterosexuality" (xvii).
 32. Simpson also objects to Ben Jelloun's "castration" of the female Ahmed in *La Nuit sacrée* via a forced clitorectomy while in prison. She argues that not only is Ahmed's identity no longer multiple, but as a woman she is "sex-less" (331).
 33. Schor locates the first feminist critique of essentialism in Simone de Beauvoir's now well-known statement: "On ne naît pas femme: on le devient" (*Le Deuxième sexe II: L'Expérience vécue*. [Paris: Gallimard, 1949] 13.). The Beauvoirian perspective still forms the foundation of the culturist or constructivist school of anti-essentialists who emphasize, as Schor notes, the critical role of society in the creation of gender difference and who tend to view femininity as an oppressive patriarchal construct. Judith Butler's work is certainly among the bestknown of this group.
 34. In a parallel manner, Schor distinguishes between various schools of feminist anti-essentialism. She discusses three other significant critiques of essentialist feminism, which she categorizes as the Linguistic Critique, a Lacanian analysis of the crucial role of language in the creation of gender difference which analyzes the necessarily phallogocentric subject formation that is produced in and through language; the Philosophical Critique, a Derridean critique of essentialism which looks beyond the deep psychological structures of language, such as the illusory nature of the binary opposition man/woman, to the philosophical underpinnings of Western thought; and the Feminist Critique, which is the only of these critiques to have arisen from inside the women's movement, and which stresses the inherent reductiveness of the term Woman in its implication that one single term can fairly represent the vast diversity of women. An anti-essentialist argument from the point of view of a Feminist Critique would be concerned not only with an understanding of the way in which

- the term “Woman” functions to limit women and their experiences but also with the creation of new and unlimited “specifically female subjectivities” (Schor 44–45).
35. Whereas French feminist thought has remained at the forefront of the essentialist/anti-essentialist debates, Alice Jardine stresses that a number of French feminist thinkers, such as Hélène Cixous, Sarah Kofman, Julia Kristeva, and Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni, would hesitate to use the term “feminist” to describe their own work (*Gynesis* 561).
 36. For Locke’s distinction between real and nominal essences, see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Elizabeth Holt for Thomas Bassett, 1690), 2.31, 3.3, 3.6, 3.10, 4.6, 4.12 and 13.6.
 37. Shortly after Silence’s twelfth birthday, for example, Nature reproaches Silence for ignoring Nature’s plans for “her.” Nature emphasizes the great sacrifices that she made for Silence and attempts to persuade Silence to change his/her behavior by stimulating Silence’s sense of guilt:

Dist li: ‘Chi a estrange coze,
 Ki te deduis al fuer de malle,
 Et vas si al vent et al halle,
 Car une special forme ai
 Don’t a mes .ii. mains te formai,
 Et la bialté qu’ai tant celé[e]
 Ai tolte en toi amoncelee.
 .m. gens me tienent por escarse
 Por la bialté, dont tu iés farse;
 Car jo ai de .m. gens retraite
 La bialté, dont tu iés refaite. (2502–12;
 brackets line 2507 in Thorpe’s edition)

38. See Fatima Mernissi et al, *Femmes-partagées: Famille-travail* (Casablanca: Le Fennec/Approches, 1988). See also Fatima Mernissi, *Femme et pouvoirs* (Casablanca: Le Fennec/Approches, 1990); *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*, (New York: Schenkum, 1975); and *La Peur—modernité?* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1992); and Ghita El Khayat, *Le Monde arabe au féminin* (Paris: L’Harmatân, 1988).
39. De Lauretis adds that the disappearance of feminism is indeed a “corollary of poststructuralism and the stated position of those who call themselves ‘post-feminists’” (10).
40. Fuss further problematizes the concept of “politics,” noting that it is both indefinable and crucial to feminism: “Politics is precisely the self-evident category in feminist discourse—that which is most irreducible and most indispensable. As feminism’s *essential* component, it tenaciously resists definition; it is both the most transparent and the most elusive of terms” (111, emphasis original). Fuss contrasts her feminist stance which privileges the position of politics with Haraway’s for whom alliance comes first: “Whereas Haraway posits a coalition of women as the basis of a possible socialist politics, I see politics as the basis of a possible coalition of women.... Politics marks the site where Haraway’s project begins and where mine ends” (111, italics in original).
41. See Fuss’s essay, “Reading Like a Feminist,” pages 106–108 for further discussion of Spivak’s provisional deployment of essentialism within the Subaltern Studies group to align themselves with historical “subalterns” and, through this, to displace traditional elitist approaches to South Asian cultural studies.

42. See "Reading Like a Feminist" 98–115, for an elaboration of this idea.
43. Fuss responds in detail to Robert Scholes's essay, "Reading Like a Man," in which Scholes takes issue with the "mastering strategies" in Jonathan Culler's "Reading as a Woman" (in which Culler draws, in turn, on Peggy Kamuf's "Writing like a Woman"). Scholes argues that "deconstruction's de-essentializing gestures are merely rephallocentrizing appropriations in the end" (Fuss 99); Tania Modleski's "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation," which also addresses Culler's "patriarchal" attitude (Modleski 133); and Gayatri Spivak's "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography."
44. In the following pages, Fuss reformulates this more theoretically and more generally: "The poststructuralist objection to experience is not a repudiation of grounds of knowing per se but rather a refusal of the hypostatisation of experience as *the* ground (and the most stable ground) of knowledge production" (103, emphasis original).
45. Note that Salem refers to the character as Zahra and uses feminine pronoun and adjective designations.
46. Salem begins his tale with a ridiculous description of Ahmed's burial in which Fatima's father, now aged and infirm, is so enraged by the discovery of Ahmed's female anatomy when the *laveurs* cleanse Ahmed's body that he falls out of his wheelchair on top of Ahmed's corpse, catching his *djellaba* on Ahmed's teeth, displacing Ahmed's head, and exposing himself indecently (138). Salem also adds two absurd descriptions of the events following Ahmed's burial in which his/her body is carved into pieces and fed to the animals in the zoo, or, more plausibly according to Salem, enshrined in a *marabout* shaped like two giant breasts or very ample buttocks as the remains of a saint, "le saint dit de la fécondité bienheureuse, car il assure aux femmes d'accoucher d'enfants mâles" (138).
47. Amar refers to Ahmed as a man throughout his narrative.
48. Fatouma's description of this nameless woman sounds strikingly like Fatima: "Elle était jeune et malade. Elle devait souffrir d'asthme, peut-être—je n'en suis pas sûre—d'épilepsie" (165). This woman was mysteriously "deposited" inside Fatouma and must be liberated from her.
49. Thus the timing of and motivation for her cross-dressing differ markedly from the story of the birth and upbringing of Ahmed that the original storyteller has presented and which has formed the central premise of the novel until now.
50. The *troubadour aveugle* explains that the *bâtène* is an Egyptian coin that dates from 1851, but that the date is difficult for him to make out because it is written in Indian numbers ("ces espèces d'hiéroglyphes indiens où le 2 est l'envers du 6, le 8 un 7 renversé, le 5 est un zéro et le zéro un point banal!" [175]). He describes the two sides of the coin: "Sur le côté face, une figure d'homme avec une moustache fine, une chevelure longue et les yeux assez grands. Sur l'avvers, le même dessin sauf que l'homme n'a plus de moustache et qu'il a une apparence féminine" (175–6). He states that he later learned that the coin was made by the father of twins, a boy and a girl, for whom he had "une passion folle" (176). *Zahir*, on the other hand, refers to "l'apparent, le visible." As the *troubadour aveugle* notes, "C'est le contraire du *bâtène*, qui est l'intérieur, ce qui est enterré dans le ventre" (176).
51. He begins his tale this time by referring to the eighth saint (Ahmed-Zahra) of the city: "Si notre ville a sept portes c'est qu'elle a été aimée par sept saints. Mais cet amour est devenu une malediction. Je le sais a present depuis que j'ai osé raconter l'histoire et le destin de la huitième naissance. La mort est là, dehors, elle tourne comme la roue du hasard" (202).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

1. See Robert Neustadt, (*Con*)*Fusing Signs and Postmodern Positions*, Garland, 1999.

Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. *Dressing Up. Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972.
- Ahmed, Leila. "Early Islam and the Position of Women." *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. Eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. 58–73.
- Akbari, Suzanne Conklin. "Nature's Forge Recast in the *Roman de Silence*." *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1994. 39–46.
- Al-Andalusi, Saïd. *Science in the Medieval World*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1991.
- Allen, Peter. "The Ambiguity of Silence: Gender, Writing, and *Le Roman de Silence*." *Sign, Sentence, Discourse: Language in Medieval Thought and Literature*. Eds. Julian N. Wasserman and Lois Roney. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1989. 98–112.
- Anson, John. "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif." *Viator* 5 (1974):1–37.
- Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*. Trans. A.L. Peck. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963.
- . *History of Animals* V, 6. Trans. D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson. *The Works of Aristotle* Vol. 4. Eds. J.A. Smith and W.D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910.
- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Avicenna. *Canon of Medicine*. Trans. O. Cameron Gruner. London: Luzak, 1930.
- Aymé, Marcel. *La Vouivre*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945.
- Bacon, Francis. *The Advancement of Learning* [1605], *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. 3, Eds. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath. 14 vols. London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1857–74.
- Ballengee, Jennifer. "Ahmed-Zahra: Resisting the Split, Exploring the Wound." *Literature and Cruelty/Littérature et Cruauté*. Preceedings of the Sixth Annual Graduate Conference in French, Francophone and Comparative Literature. Ed. Vincent Desroches. New York: Columbia UP, 1996. 81–88.
- Bargenda, Angela. "Le Theme du double chez Tahar Ben Jelloun." *Revue Française* 8:2 (1993):19–27.
- Bartra, Roger. *Wild Men in the Looking Glass: The Mythic Origins of European Otherness*. Trans. Carl T. Berrisford. Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1994.
- Beauvoir, Simone de. *Le Deuxième sexe II: L'Expérience vécue*. Paris: Gallimard, 1949.
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar. *L'Enfant de sable*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1985.
- Bernheimer, Richard. *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952.
- Berthens, Hans. *The Idea of Postmodernism: A History*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- Bloch, R. Howard. "Silence and Holes: The *Roman de Silence* and the Art of the Trouvère." *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986):81–99.

- Blumreich, Kathleen. "Lesbian Desire in the Old French *Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):47–62.
- Boyer, Régis, preface. *Fées, sorcières et loups-garous au moyen âge*. Paris: Editions Imago, 1992.
- Brahney, Kathleen. "When Silence Was Golden: Female Personae in the *Roman de Silence*." *The Spirit of the Court*. Eds. Glyn S.Burgess and Robert A.Taylor. Cambridge: D.S.Brewer, 1985. 52–61.
- Bruckner, Matilda Tomaryn. *Shaping Romance: Interpretation, Truth, and Closure in Twelfth-Century French Fictions*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.
- Brundage, James A. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
- Bullough, Vern L. "Cross Dressing and Gender Role Change in the Middle Ages," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. Eds. Vern L.Bullough and James A.Brundage. New York: Garland, 1996. 223–242.
- . *Cross-Dressing, Sex, and Gender*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.
- . *Sexual Variance in Society and History*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976.
- . "Transvestites in the Middle Ages." *American Journal of Sociology* 79 (1974):1381–1394.
- Bullough, Vern L., and James A.Brundage, eds. *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*. New York: Garland, 1996.
- Burke, John G. "The Wild Man's Pedigree." *The Wild Man Within*. Eds. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E.Novak. Pittsburgh: U of Pennsylvania P, 1972. 259–280.
- Burns, E.Jane. *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Old French Literature*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Cazenave, Odile. "Gender, Age, and Narrative Transformations in *L'Enfant de sable* by Tahar Ben Jelloun." *The French Review* 64:3 (1991): 437–450.
- Camille, Michael. *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.
- Céard, Jean, ed. and intro. *Des monstres et prodiges*. Geneva: Droz, 1971.
- Chevalier, Anne. "'Le Voile des fables' dans *L'Enfant de sable* de Tahar Ben Jelloun." *Europas islamische Nachbarn: Studien zur Literatur und Geschichte des Maghreb*. Ed. Ernstpeter Ruhe. Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1993. 61–70.
- Chrétien de Troyes. *Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lion*. Ed. and trans. William W. Kibler. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Cixous, Hélène. "Sorties." *La Jeune née*. Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément. Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1975. 114–246.
- Collins, Jim. *Uncommon Cultures: Popular Culture and Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Cooper, Kate Mason. "Elle and L: Sexualized Textuality in the *Roman de Silence*." *Romance Notes* 25:3 (1985):341–360.
- Côté, Paul Raymond. "Yann Queffélec." *The Contemporary Novel in France*. Ed. William Thompson. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1995. 331–351.
- Curtius, E.R. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.
- Darcos, Xavier, Jean-Pierre Robert and Bernard Tartyre, eds. *Le Moyen Age et le XVIe siècle en littérature*. Poitiers: Hachette, 1988.
- Daston, Lorraine, and Katharine Park. *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750*. New York: Zone Books, 1998.
- Déjeux, Jean. "Les Romans de Tahar Ben Jelloun ou 'Le Territoire de la blessure'." *Carrefour de Cultures: Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Leiner*. Ed. Régis Antoine. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993. 273–86.
- . *Maghreb littératures de langue française*. Paris: Arcantère Editions, 1993.

- Dekker, Rudolf M., and Lotte C. van der Pol. *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe*. New York: Saint Martin's P, 1997.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. "The Essence of the Triangle or, Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the U.S., and Britain." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 1–39.
- Delcourt, Marie. *Hermaphrodite: Mythes et rites de la bisexualité dans l'Antiquité classique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1974.
- . "Signature Event Context." *Glyph* 1 (1997):172–97.
- Descartes, René. *The Passions of the Soul* [1642]. Trans. Stephen H. Voss. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989.
- Dib, Mohammed. *Le Sommeil d'Eve*. Paris: Sinbad, 1989.
- Diderot, Denis, and Jean d'Alembert, eds. *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 35 vols. Paris: David l'Aîné Briasson, Durand Le Breton, and Paris/Neufchastel: Samuel Faulche, 1751–80.
- Douglas, Adam. *The Beast Within: A History of the Werewolf*. London: Chapman Publishers Ltd., 1992.
- Dover, Kenneth. *Greek Homosexuality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Driver, S.R. *A Critical and Exegetical Comment on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed. Reprinted, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951.
- Duby, Georges. *Le Chevalier, la Femme et le Prêtre*. Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1981.
- Dudley, Edward, and Maximillian E. Novak, eds. *The Wild Man Within*. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1972.
- Durand, Gilbert. *L'Imagination symbolique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964.
- Eco, Umberto. *The Open Work*. Trans. Anna Cancogni. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Eicher, Eva, and Linda Washburn. "Genetic Control of Primary Sex Determination in Mice." *Annual Review of Genetics* 20 (1986):327–360.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The Two and the One*. Trans. J.M. Cohen. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965.
- El Khayat, Ghita. *Le Monde arabe au féminin*. Paris: Harmattan, 1988.
- Ellis, Havelock. *Eonism and Other Supplementary Studies*, vol. 6. *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1926.
- Emerick, Ellen L. "Le Roman de Mélusine: A Request for Balance". Thesis, University of Massachusetts, 1991.
- Erickson, John D. "Femme voilée, récit voilé dans *L'Enfant de sable* de Tahar Ben Jelloun." *Carrefour de Cultures. Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Leiner*. Ed. Régis Antoine. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993. 287–96.
- . "Metoikoi and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi." *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*. Eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham: Duke UP, 1995. 427–450.
- Fausto-Sterling, Anne. "The Five Sexes." *The Sciences* (1993):20–24.
- . "Life in the XY Corral." *Women's Studies International Forum. Special Issue on Feminism and Science* 12:3 (1989):319–331.
- Fayad, Marie. "Borges in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable*: Beyond Intertextuality." *The French Review* 67:2 (1993):291–299.
- Feinberg, Leslie. *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to RuPaul*. Boston: Beacon P, 1996.
- Ferrante, Joan. "Public Postures and Private Maneuvers: Roles Medieval Women Play." *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*. Eds. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1988. 213–229.
- Ford, C.S., and F.A. Beach. *Patterns of Sexual Behavior*. New York: Harper, 1951.
- Foucault, Michel. *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La Volonté de savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1978.

- Fuss, Diane. "Reading Like a Feminist." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 98–115.
- Gallagher, Edward J. "The Modernity of *Le Roman de Silence*." *University of Dayton Review* 21:3 (1992):31–42.
- Gamson, Joshua. "Do Ask, Do Tell." *Utne Reader* 73 (Jan–Feb 1996), 78–83.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- . *Vice Versa: Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Gaunt, Simon. "The Significance of Silence." *Paragraph* 13:2 (1990): 202–216.
- Gelzer, Heinrich. "Der Silenceroman von Heldris de Cornuälle," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 47 (1927):87–99.
- . *Nature: Zum Einfluss der Scholastik auf den altfranzösischen Roman*. Halle a.S.: M.Niemeyer, 1917.
- Gibbins, Christopher. "Dismantling the Maghreb: Contemporary Moroccan Writing and Islamic Diversity." *The Marabout and the Muse: New Approaches to Islam in African Literature*. Ed. Kenneth W.Harrow. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. 23–39.
- Gilbert, Max. *The Fairies Melusine, Viviane, and Aine*, London: Richard Madley, 1974.
- Gilmore, Gloria Thomas. "Le Roman de Silence: Allegory in Ruin or Womb of Irony?" *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):111–123.
- Gimbutas, Marija. *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*, Berkeley: U of California P, 1974; Reprint London: Thames and Hudson, 1982.
- Gontard, Marc. "Effets de métissage dans la littérature marocaine de langue française." *Francographies* 2 Special (1993):65–72.
- Grant, Edward. *The Foundations of Modern Sciences in the Middle Ages: Their Religious, Institutional, and Intellectual Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Guillaume de Palerne. Roman du XIIIe siècle*. Ed. and intro. Alexandre Micha. Genève: Libraire Droz, 1990.
- Harvey, Robert. "Purloined Letters: Intertextuality and Intersexuality in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*." *Articulations of Difference: Gender Studies and Writing in French*. Eds. and intro. Dominique D.Fisher and Lawrence R.Schehr. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997. 226–45.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Chemins qui ne mènent a nulle part*. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
- Heldris de Cornuälle. *Le Roman de Silence*. Ed. Lewis Thorpe. Cambridge: W.Heffer & Sons, 1972.
- Herd, Gilbert, ed. *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*. New York: Zone Books, 1994.
- Hirschfeld, Magnus. *Die Transvestiten: Eine Untersuchung über den erotischen Verkleideuntrieb*. Berlin: Alfred Pulvermacher, 1910.
- Hotchkiss, Valerie. *Clothes Make the Man: Female Cross-Dressing in the Middle Ages*. New York: Garland, 1996.
- Huet, Marie-Hélène. *Monstrous Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993.
- Irving, P.M.C.Forbes. *Metamorphoses in Greek Myth*. Oxford: Clarendon P, 1990.
- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984.
- Isidore of Seville. *Etymologiarum Sive Originum Liber XI*. Trans. and intro. William D.Sharpe. In *Isidore of Seville: The Medical Writings*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n. 5., 54, pt. 2, 1963.
- Jamson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke UP, 1991.
- Jean d'Arras. *Méluise, Roman du XIVe siècle*. Ed. Louis Stouff. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1974.
- Jencks, Charles. *The Language of Postmodern Architecture*. New York: Rizzoli, 1984.
- Jewell, Helen. *Women in Medieval England*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1996.
- Jewers, Caroline. "The Non-Existent Knight: Adventure in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):87–110.

- Kappler, Claude. *Monstres, demons et merveilles a la fin du Moyen âge*. Paris: Payot, 1980.
- Keddie, Nikki R., intro. *Women in Middle Eastern History. Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. Eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. 1–22.
- Kay, Sarah, and Miri Rubin, eds. *Framing Medieval Bodies*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994.
- Kibre, Pearl. *Studies in Medieval Science: Alchemy, Astrology, Mathematics, and Medicine*. London: Hambledon, 1984.
- Kinoshita, Sharon. "Heldris de Cornualle's *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage." *PMLA* 110:3 (1995):397–409.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982.
- Krueger, Roberta L. "Women Readers and the Politics of Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender in Old French Verse Romance*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. 101–127.
- Labbie, Erin F. "The Specular Image of the Gender-Neutral Name: Naming Silence in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):63–77.
- Lasry, Anita Benaim. "The Ideal Heroine in Medieval Romances: A Quest for Paradigm." *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 32:3 (1985):227–243.
- Lecouteux, Claude. *Fées, sorcières et loups-garous au moyen âge: Histoire du double*. Preface, Régis Boyer. Paris: Editions Imago, 1992.
- . *Mélusine et le Chevalier au cygne*. Paris: Payot, 1982.
- Lecoy, Felix. "*Le Roman de Silence* d'Heldris de Cornualle." *Romania* 99 (1978):109–125.
- Leff, Gordon. *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook*. New York: New York UP, 1976.
- Le Goff, Jacques. *The Medieval Imagination*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1985.
- Le Paumier, Claude Stephen. *Ambroise Paré d'après de nouveaux documents découverts aux archives nationales*. Paris: Charavay Frères, 1884.
- Lloyd, Heather. "The Triumph of Pragmatism in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Rewards and Punishments in the Arthurian Romances and Lyric Poetry of Medieval France*. Eds. Peter V. Davies and Angus J. Kennedy. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987. 77–88.
- Lowe, Lisa. "Literary Nomadics in Francophone Allegories of Postcolonialism: Pham Van Ky and Tahar Ben Jelloun." *Yale French Studies* 82 (1993):43–61.
- Luttrell, Claude. *The Creation of the First Arthurian Romance: A Quest*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1974.
- Maazaoui, Abbes. "*L'Enfant de sable* et *La Nuit sacrée* ou *Le Corps tragique*." *The French Review* 69:1 (1995):68–71.
- Martin-Civat, P. *Le Très simple secret de Mélusine, mythique aïeule des Lusignan*. Poitiers: Imprimerie P. Oudin, 1969.
- McCracken, Peggy. "The Boy Who Was a Girl: Reading Gender in the *Roman de Silence*." *Romanic Review* 85:4 (1995):517–536.
- McNamara, Jo Ann. "Muffled Voices: The Lives of Consecrated Women in the Fourth Century." *Medieval Religious Women*, vol. 1. *Distant Echoes*. Eds. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank. Cistercian Studies Series, No. 71. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984.
- Mehta, Brinda J. "Proclaiming a New Order: Daughters in Action in the Mother-Daughter Dyad in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Enfant de sable* and *Les Yeux baissés*." *Revue Française* 9:1 (1994):39–58.
- Mernissi, Fatima, et al. *Femmes-partagées: Famille-travail*. Casablanca: Le Fennec/Approches, 1988.
- Mernissi, Fatima. *Femme et pouvoirs*. Casablanca: Le Fennec/Approches, 1990.
- . *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*. New York: Schenkum, 1975.
- . *La Peur—modernité?* Paris: Albin Michel, 1992.
- . *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*. Trans. Allen Mandelbaum. San Diego: Harcourt, 1993.

- Modleski, Tania. "Feminism and the Power of Interpretation: Some Critical Readings." *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies*. Ed. Teresa De Lauretis. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986.
- Ndiaye, Christiane. "De la pratique des detours chez Sembène, Chamoiseau et BenJelloun." *Tangence* 49 (1995):63–77.
- Neustadt, Robert. *(Con)Fusing Signs and Postmodern Positions*. New York: Garland, 1999.
- Owen, Sally. "Transforming History." *On the Issues* 5:4 (1996):48–49.
- Page, David C., et al. "The Sex-Determining Region of the Human Y Chromosome Encodes a Finger Protein." *Cell* 51 (1987):1091–1104.
- Paré, Ambroise. *Des Monstres et prodiges*. Céard, Jean, ed. and intro. Geneva: Droz, 1971.
- Park, Katharine and Lorraine Daston. "Unnatural Conceptions: The Study of Monsters in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France and England." *Past and Present* 92 (1981):20–54.
- Parker, Andrew, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds. and intro. *Performativity and Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Patterson, Lee. "On the Margin: Postmodernism, Ironic History, and Medieval Studies." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 65:1 (1990): 87–108.
- Perraudin, Pascale. "Subversion of l'autorité dans *L'Enfant de sable* de Ben Jelloun." *Francographies* 2 (1995):137–146.
- Perret, Michele. "Travesties et transsexuelles: Yde, Silence, Grisandole, Blanchandine." *Romance Notes* 25:3 (1985):328–340.
- Powers, David S. *Studies in Qur'an and Hadith: The Formation of the Islamic Law of Inheritance*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986.
- Psaki, Regina, trans. and preface. *Le Roman de Silence*. Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Vol. 63 Series B. New York: Garland, 1991.
- . "Introduction." Special Issue on *Le Roman de Silence*. Ed. Regina Psaki. *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):3–6.
- . "The Modern Editor and Medieval 'Misogyny': Text Editing and *Le Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):78–86.
- Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Complete Works*. Trans. Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist P, 1987.
- Queffélec, Yann. *Les Noces barbares*. Paris: Gallimard, 1985.
- Rabine, Leslie Wahl. "Essentialism and Its Contexts: Saint-Simonian and Poststructuralist Feminists." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 130–50.
- Raymond, François, and Daniel Compère. *Les Maîtres du fantastique en littérature*. Paris: Bordas, 1994.
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Sex, Dissidence and Damnation: Minority Groups in the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Ringer, Loren. "Exchange, Identity, and Transvestism in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Dalhousie French Studies* 28 (1994):3–13.
- Roche-Mahdi, Sarah, ed. and trans. *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. Medieval Texts and Studies: No. 10. East Lansing, MI: Colleagues P, 1992.
- Roques, René, preface. *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*. Trans. Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist P, 1987.
- Rostand, Jean. *La Formation de l'être, histoire des idées sur la generation*. Paris: Hachette, 1930.
- Russell, Jeffrey Barton. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1972.
- Saint Jerome. *Commentarius in Epistolem ad Ephasios*, bk. 16. *Patrologia Latina*. Ed. J.P.Migne, vol. 26. Paris: Garnier Freres, 1894.
- Saint Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger, 1947.
- Salmonson, Jessica Amanda. *The Encyclopedia of Amazons: Women Warriors from Antiquity to the Modern Era*. New York: Paragon, 1991.

- Sander, Paula. "Gendering the Ungendered Body." *Women in Middle Eastern History. Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*. Eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. 74–95.
- Salvador, José David. *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1991.
- Scholes, Robert. "Éperon Strings." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 116–29.
- Schor, Naomi. "This Essentialism Which Is Not One: Coming to Grips with Irigaray." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. 40–62.
- . "Introduction." *The Essential Difference*. Eds. Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994. vii–xix.
- Schor, Naomi, and Elizabeth Weed, eds. *The Essential Difference*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
- Sergeant, Bernard. *Homosexuality in Greek Myth*. Boston: Beacon P, 1986.
- Shahar, Shulamit. *The Fourth Estate. A History of Women in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Chaya Galai. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Simpson, Shona Elizabeth. "One Face Less: Masks, Time, and the Telling of Stories in Tahar Ben Jelloun's *The Sand Child*." *Allegory Revisited: Ideals of Mankind*. Ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1994. 325–32.
- Skrainka, Sarah Lynn. "L'Enfant de sable: Roman de l'ambiguïté." M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia: May 1993.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography." *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987. 202–207.
- Stock, Lorraine Kochanske. "The Importance of Being Gender 'Stable': Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):7–34.
- Sturges, Robert S. *Medieval Interpretation: Models of Reading Literary Narrative, 1100–1500*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Summers, Montague. *The Werewolf*. New York: Bell, 1966.
- Thorslev, Peter L. Jr. "The Wild Man's Revenge." *The Wild Man Within*. Eds. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1972. 281–307.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970.
- Wakeman, Mary. *God's Battle with the Monsters: A Study in Biblical Imagery*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973.
- Walker, Barbara C. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983.
- Waters, Elizabeth. "The Third Path: Alternative Sex, Alternate Gender in *Le Roman de Silence*." *Arthuriana* 7:2 (1997):35–46.
- Wheelwright, Julie. *Amazons and Military Maids: Women Who Dressed as Men in the Pursuit of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*. New York: New York UP, 1990.
- White, Hayden. "The Forms of Wildness." *The Wild Man Within*. Eds. Edward Dudley and Maximillian E. Novak. Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1972. 3–38.
- Williams, David. *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1996.
- Woodhouse, Annie. *Fantastic Women. Sex, Gender, and Transvestism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989.
- Xavier, Darcos, Jean-Pierre Robert and Bernard Tartyre, eds. *Le Moyen Age et le XVIe siècle en littérature*. Poitiers: Hachette, 1988.

Index

- ambiguity 2, 3, 19, 39, 82, 87, 88, 91, 93–94, 100–102, 103, 105, 106, 112, 114, 115, 120, 122, 123, 139, 148, 149, 153–154, 172–173 n. 2, 173 n. 3, 182 n. 16
- androgyny 158
- anthropomorphism 6, 165 n. 6
- Aristotle 12, 13, 128, 129, 133, 137, 167 n. 15–16, 186 n. 14
- baptism, of Silence 55, 87
- Ben Jelloun, Tahar 19, 39, 42, 73, 100, 109–111, 112, 117, 136, 138, 173–174 n. 3, 178–179 n. 41, 183 n. 23, 183 n. 24, 183 n. 25, 184 n. 3, 185 n. 4, 185 n. 12, 188 n. 32
- binary
- opposition 44, 57–58
 - sex-gender categories 39, 44, 45, 51, 61, 86, 99, 114, 122–123, 130–133, 153, 174–175 n. 11, 175 n. 12, 188–189 n. 34
 - thinking 44, 50, 74, 93, 155
- biological essentialism 44, 65, 135–138, 140, 141, 177 n. 29, 188 n. 31, 188 n. 33, 190 n. 41
- blurring
- of categories 11, 13, 16, 39
 - of gender 60, 64, 80, 82, 89, 104, 122–123, 153, 174 n. 10, 174–175 n. 11
 - textual 18, 25, 107, 146, 147, 149, 152
- chivalry 67
- circumcision, of Ahmed 56, 62
- closure, rejection of 1, 2, 26, 101, 107–109, 111, 135, 149, 153, 155, 183 n. 25, 184 n. 28
- clothing 47, 55–57, 177 n. 27, 179 n. 43
- construction
- of sex/gender 3, 39, 42, 44–45, 46, 51, 55–56, 58, 61–63, 70, 71, 73, 77, 95, 99, 121, 125, 127, 134, 135, 143, 153
 - textual 2, 77, 141, 143, 146, 151
- constructionism 48, 135–136, 140–141, 142, 177 n. 29
- cross-dressing 3, 4, 39, 44, 54, 87, 93, 122–123, 135, 138, 139, 153, 155, 174 n. 10, 175 n. 12, 175 n. 13, 175 n. 18, 176 n. 19, 176 n. 20, 177 n. 26, 178 n. 36, 178 n. 37, 190 n. 49
- and destabilization of binary system 3, 39, 44, 51, 155, 162
 - history of 46–47
 - mythological precursors 4
 - study of 47–49, 51
 - terminology 49–50

deformed discourse (David Williams) 4, 5, 6–8, 13, 20, 156
 determinate thought 2, 9, 17, 100, 101, 102, 112, 159, 164
 drag 44, 48, 49, 175 n. 13, 177 n. 26
 Ahmed as Lalla Zahra 72, 73, 104, 119, 139

Guillaume de Palerne 21–27, 169 n. 28, 169 n. 31, 169 n. 32

Heldris de Cornuälle 39, 41–42, 52, 66, 70, 82–83, 87–90, 94–95, 97–99, 172 n. 2, 182 n. 18, 182 n. 20, 184 n. 1

hermaphrodite 48, 131, 132, 157–158, 166 n. 9, 174–175 n. 11, 178 n. 33, 187 n. 21, 187 n. 23

hybridism

 linguistic 43, 98–100, 100–101, 102, 174 n. 9, 178–179 n. 41

 physical 3–5, 8, 11, 16–21, 23, 25–27, 31, 33, 35, 38, 39, 43, 44, 50, 56, 58, 60, 68, 77, 79, 80–82, 86–88, 94, 101, 104, 107, 108, 110, 111, 117, 122, 123, 127, 139, 142, 153, 15–164, 168 n. 26, 172 n. 43, 173 n. 3, 174 n. 9

 socio-cultural 21, 111, 163, 164, 168 n. 26

indeterminacy

 narrative 1, 3, 18, 19, 20, 39, 44, 77, 82–84, 86, 88, 101, 112, 141, 153, 163, 164, 173–174 n. 3

 physical 4, 16, 44, 72–74, 77, 82–84, 86, 101, 104–105, 111, 115, 122, 135, 141–142, 154, 155, 156, 158, 164, 173–174 n. 3

indeterminate meaning 2, 3, 9, 17, 112, 159, 164

inheritance

 in *L'Enfant de sable* 42, 53–54, 67, 139, 178 n. 33

 in the *Roman de Silence* 42, 51–52, 54, 59, 99, 114, 121, 181 n. 13

inner self 45, 61, 63, 64, 68, 71, 74, 77, 86, 119

 inner/outer opposition 57–58

interpretation, open 1, 2, 8, 9, 17, 18, 100, 102, 107, 143, 153

Iphis 41–43

journal, Ahmed's 57, 66, 100, 102, 104, 106–108, 119, 126, 141, 143–145, 150, 152

lycanthropy 21–22, 25

 see werewolves

Maghreb literature 21, 168–169 n. 26

marvelous 3, 4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 20, 159, 166 n. 9, 185 n. 12

melusines/serpent-women 3, 4, 27–28

Méluise 27–33, 170 n. 36

Merlin 54, 84, 91–93, 95, 113–115, 117, 120, 169 n. 20, 172 n. 425, 184 n. 17, 184 n. 1, 184 n. 2, 185 n. 9

Middle Ages 2, 4, 6, 8, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 33, 46, 47, 52, 157, 158, 163, 166 n. 7, 168 n. 18, 168 n. 19, 169 n. 28, 170 n. 36, 171–172 n. 42, 175 n. 15, 175 n. 16, 178 n. 37, 186 n. 16

minstrels 64, 67, 69, 70, 73

modernity 1–4, 8–11, 13, 14, 16–22, 26–28, 33, 34, 39, 44, 48, 53, 66, 82, 94, 123, 132, 136, 155, 157, 160–164, 168 n. 18, 168 n. 25, 170 n. 34, 170 n. 37, 172–173 n. 2, 182 n. 16

monsters 5–8, 10, 12–16, 20–24, 32, 34, 37, 38, 117, 155–157, 160, 166 n. 9, 166 n. 11, 167 n. 13, 170 n. 35

monstrous 3, 5–10, 12–16, 19–22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39, 41, 42, 47, 117, 127, 154–160, 162, 163, 165 n. 5, 166 n. 11, 167 n. 15, 168 n. 18

naming

in *Silence* 45, 55–56, 70, 83, 86, 115, 180 n. 6

in *L'Enfant* 55–56

narrative voice 94–95, 100, 110, 150, 155, 156, 182 n. 19

Nature 13, 43, 52, 55, 57, 58–60, 64–66, 68, 72, 77, 78, 84, 86, 88, 90, 92, 94–95, 98, 100, 113, 115–116, 119, 121, 125, 127, 136, 138–139, 145, 153, 156, 167 n. 15, 174 n. 7, 177 n. 31, 177–178 n. 32, 182 n. 18, 189 n. 37

negative theology 6

Les Noces barbares 18, 33–39, 172 n. 43

Nurture (Culture) 43, 55, 57, 58–60, 64–66, 72, 77, 78, 82, 84, 86, 88, 92, 94–95, 98, 100, 113, 115, 121–123, 125, 145, 153, 156

openness, narrative 2, 106–112, 181–182 n. 14

Paré, Ambroise 14–16, 166 n. 9, 166 n. 11, 168 n. 21, 168 n. 22

passing 64, 66, 72, 181 n. 8

performative 73, 120, 180 n. 51

gender as performative act 39, 44, 45, 124, 128, 134, 179 n. 49

performativity 45, 70–71, 179–180 n. 50, 180 n. 51

perspective, reader's double 66, 77–82, 93, 100, 122

philosophical negation

(see also: *via negativa*, negative theology, Pseudo-Dionysius) 6–7, 158, 159, 165–166 n. 6

play, linguistic 1, 8, 64, 82–83, 166 n. 8

thematic 3, 25, 44, 83, 89, 122, 123

postmodernism 2, 7, 8, 18, 102, 111, 160, 161, 163, 173 n. 3, 180 n. 51

Pseudo-Dionysius 6–7, 13, 165 n. 2, 165 n. 4, 165 n. 5, 165–166 n. 6, 168 n. 19

puberty 131

of Ahmed 57, 61–64

of *Silence* 58–61

Quran 53, 178 n. 34

rationalism 13

readers, characters as 88, 141–153

romance, medieval 1–2, 3, 19, 20, 36, 52, 88, 98–99, 103, 114, 122–123, 182 n. 21, 185 n. 7, 185 n. 12

shapeshifting 3, 19, 21, 31, 169 n. 32

sign and signified, critique of 7, 8, 17, 24, 35, 84, 85, 155, 163–164, 166 n. 8

social constructionism (see: constructionism)

Le Sommeil d'Eve 18, 21–27, 169 n. 29

structure, narrative

of *L'Enfant de sable* 100–101

of *Silence* 99

storyteller(s), in *L'Enfant de sable* 102–104, 106–112, 143–153

unveiling

of Ahmed 119–121

of Silence 113–116

via negativa 6, 165 n. 6

via positiva 9

voice, narrative (see: narrative voice)

voice, of Ahmed 63, 67, 109, 110, 126, 147, 153

La Vouivre 19, 27–33, 170 n. 37

werewolves 3, 19, 21, 22, 50, 155, 169 n. 31

wild men 3, 4, 19, 33–36, 50, 155, 172 n. 45

wonders 5, 8, 9–13, 20, 160, 162, 166 n. 9, 167 n. 13

wordplay 77, 87–93, 98, 100, 179 n. 43, 181 n. 8, 182 n. 15

Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion 33–39, 171–172 n. 42, 172 n. 45, 172 n. 46